



# PALESTINE UNVEILED



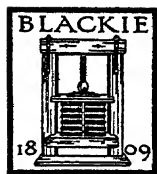
BRITISH TROOPS MARCHING INTO NAZARETH TO QUELL DISORDERS

Church of the Annunciation in right background

# PALESTINE UNVEILED

BY

DOUGLAS V. DUFF



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To

SARAH AARONSOHN

the martyr maid who died for Palestine  
and a world unworthy of her sacrifice



## AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

A FRIEND with whom I grew to manhood made the journey to Palestine, his first voyage beyond the coasts of Britain. Though my fates have led me to trail a mercenary pike in half a dozen wars, and to wield an unmercenary pen as some consolation for the questionable causes I have served, his has been a happier lot. One of the yeomen of England, the backbone of our English folk, he now farms the acres his fathers owned before him. Yet, in many things we think alike—in particular the mutual love we bear to the Land of Palestine, and in the mutual disgust we feel for the sorry mess which greed, inefficiency, incompetence, prostituted racial ideals, and insensate bigotry have made of a prospect which dawned so fair.

Here is what he thought, what he saw, and what he did between the desert-edge of Sinai and the soaring crests of Upper Galilee, and of the effect it all had upon him.

He saw Arab, Jew and Briton struggling together, so tragically and so unnecessarily—three fine and noble races of the highest traditions and ideals—each fired with the most noble and self-sacrificing of aims, and yet, so great is the paradox of this Too-much Promised, Unholy Holy Land, each with a savage,



## CHAPTER ONE

**M**AYBE it is an out-of-ordinary thing for a West Dorset farmer to visit Palestine, for we West-country folk are not wanderers, and there certainly is not much money these days in farming.' When we were married, close on six years ago this Michaelmas, I promised Janet a cruise, and she has been the best of comrades in the lean years since then. Things were a lot better in 1937, and we found that we could afford a decent holiday at last.

It is difficult to explain why we chose Palestine—there seem to have been quite a number of reasons; Janet's cousin, Edgar, is an officer in the Palestine Police, so we should see things much better there than if we went to some place where we would be complete strangers.

Then there is old Uncle Gurth; he has lived with us ever since Aunt Joan was buried—and he is for ever talking of what he did, and what he saw, when he was in the Yeomanry under Lord Allenby. We have heard a hundred times the tale of how the Australian Light Horse galloped into Beersheba, using fixed bayonets like lances because they had no regular cavalry weapons. The old man has been worse ever since the wireless began blaring out bits of news about British soldiers being killed in Nazareth and Jerusalem and such like places.

We had had Palestine dinned in our ears for a long while, between Edgar's letters and Uncle's yarns, and I suppose that the names of Palestine's villages and towns remain in your memory from Scripture lessons in schooldays. The droning voice of the reader of the lessons in church on Sundays does a lot to keep them before you.

Don't go running away with the notion that I am a great church-goer—the women certainly walk down to the Parish church most Sunday mornings, but someone has to stay at home—the stock aren't able to tell the difference between Sundays and weekdays.

You know how the names of the places in the Holy Land strike a note of memory: Bethlehem, Nazareth, Endor, Calvary, Jerusalem, Bethany, Jericho, the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum and the Mount of Olives—you seem to know them, especially in these days when the wireless is always mentioning them.

My knowledge of Scripture is a bit hazy, like that of most of us. Some of the characters stand out, though why they should is more than I can say—David and Goliath, Solomon and the Queen of Sheba—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—Jezebel, who seems to have spent her time coveting Naboth's vineyard or in having rows with Elijah—Jael who killed someone whose name I can't recall, with a tenpenny nail—Parson once said that it was a tent-peg.

Then, of course, Isaiah and Jeremiah because their names so often figure in the lessons. Nebuchadnezzar, too—and Lot's wife who was turned into a pillar of salt. About all that I can remember. One moment—the Twelve Tribes of Israel—Judah, Levi, Benjamin,

Reuben, Dan—I can't seem to recall any more—steady, wasn't Joseph one of them? His brethren hated him because he wore a coat of many colours, or for some other reason connected with it—those five were his brothers, so there must have been a Tribe of Joseph—but I'm hanged if I can remember the other half-dozen.

There is a confused multitude of Canaanites, Philistines, Amalekites and Assyrians surging across the background. Philistines? Ah! Samson and that hell-cat Delilah, the lady-barber—Samson killed a lot of Philistines with the jaw-bone of an ass. I mustn't forget Saul and the Witch of Endor, they were all mixed up with Philistines.

In the New Testament I feel a little surer of my ground, though not much. The Lord Christ is, of course, a little more familiar—though I did not pretend to know much about Him, except that He was crucified and rose again from the dead.

Mary, His Mother, and Magdalene, Joseph the Foster-father, the Shepherds, and the Wise Men, Herod—and who else?

Aye, I nearly forgot, a whole bunch of dim personalities—Simon Peter; Pharisees; James and John; Zebedee; a boy with a few loaves and some fishes; Judas Iscariot; Joseph of Arimathea, who is supposed to have come to Glastonbury in Somerset; Matthew, Mark and Luke, and Lazarus with his sisters, Martha and Mary. Then there were the Twelve Apostles—but I don't recall their names even as clearly as I do those of the Twelve Tribes—and I have some idea about Wise and Foolish Virgins.



The Acts of the Apostles are all mixed up with St. Paul; I only recall him because he wrote the Epistles which seems to be a queer reason for thinking of the Acts. It is a relief, when I do go to church and Parson is rather long-winded in his sermons, to follow Paul's journeys along the tracks on the maps in the back of the Bible. Those black lines have had a lot to do with this idea of going to Palestine, for I have often imagined that I was sailing along them, up and down the Eastern Mediterranean, to and from Greece and Italy and Asia Minor.

I am a fairly methodical sort of man, you can't be a farmer nowadays if you're not—and once we had made up our minds to go to Palestine, I decided to find out all that I could about the country and its history before we started. I can see no sense in spending a lot of money unless you are going to get full value. The best man to ask was the Vicar, and when I told him what I intended, he was delighted. He made a remark which stuck in my mind because of its strangeness.

"Why not try the Bible as your first guide-book?" he asked, and when I said that I could see no sense in reading through a list of names and of who begat whom, he smiled quietly, and went on.

"That is not at all what I mean," he went on. "I noticed that you have the *Encyclopædia Britannica* on your shelves. Read its article on each book of the Bible, before you commence to study the book itself. When you have done that, you will know how, and why, and when, and under what circumstances it came to be written. When you come to the names of the

great characters in the story, pause and see what the *Encyclopædia* has to say about each one. What I'm driving at, is to get you to read the Bible as an ordinary book. Try to forget that it is what you have been taught to regard it, and read it for its own sake, just as you would any other fine piece of literature.

"Get away from the idea of it being supernatural, or divinely inspired; mind you, I'm not saying that it isn't, I merely want you to read it as you would any other great literary work. Give it a chance—don't bother about the parts giving the Law to the ancient Hebrews, you will be able to appreciate that sort of thing later on. Stick to the historical books—and use your *Encyclopædia* as a guide. You'll be surprised to find how breathlessly human and truly stirring the Bible is."

It seemed like a lot of work to me, but when I told Janet what the Vicar had said, she was all agog to commence. In the long winter evenings we have time for reading, though there is little enough in summer. I've never been one to spend a lot of time in the inns, though I have my pint at the "Bull" in Bridport, or the "Half Moon" at Melplash, on market-days—and either Janet nor I care much for whist-drives and dances down in the Women's Institute, or the Parish Hall, so the Bible it was, helped out by the *Encyclopædia*.

The strangest part of it all is that the Vicar was right! I was a bit self-conscious about my Bible reading at first—hid the Book away in the morning so that the serving-maid would not think that I had gone a little daft—but I soon got past all that, and hurried

the milking so that we could make a start just as soon as the Six O'clock News was finished. To my great surprise I found my new reading far more interesting than the books we get from the County Library in Dorchester.

I began to see how the Bible had been put together, the reasons for its having been written at all—and started to love it for its own sake. I no longer looked on it as a dry-as-dust old tome which I had finished with for good and all when I left school. Let me make it quite clear, this is no story of “conversion”, or of “a soul finding redemption”, at least not in the usual sense—I do not now, nor have I ever, believed that our English version of the Bible, or any other of the numerous translations, is divinely inspired—at least not in the sense that so many people in this West Country believe—that every letter, comma, semi-colon and full stop is the Almighty's own voice speaking through the writings He personally dictated.

That just couldn't be, could it? Think of the Book's history—the human frailties, the errors of the hundreds of scribes in the old days, and the changes from one language and idiom to another, which it has undergone. Of course you may believe that all the copyists were likewise divinely protected from errors in their translations and transcriptions—but I am only a simple Dorset farmer and it is a bit too much for me to digest.

No, I reckon that my new-found reverence for the Book is something far deeper than that of the “cover-to-cover” folk—if there is anything of divine guidance in our modern versions it lies in the miraculous way

in which the grand old Chronicle has been preserved through the ages, so that we can still read the main sense of what the ancient writers set down.

Scoff if you like, grow indignant if you wish. Say that I am putting it on a level with any other history book. You will be quite wrong. To me it is now, and must always be, the First and Grandest of Books—yet it remains a book for all that.

But it is a trip to Palestine that I want to describe, not my own feelings about the Bible, so perhaps I had better get on with what I set out to do.

One thing emerged bright and clear as we pressed on with our reading and our explanatory articles from the *Encyclopædia*—the personality of the Lord Christ.

If you are a very ordinary sort of man or woman, something like Janet and myself, try this test: What mental picture have you of Him in your own mind. I'm certain sure that it is something like ours was—a slim figure of a man in white womanish garments, with fair hair falling in ringlets on its shoulders, a carefully forked blond beard and heavy-lidded eyes, probably blue. The face is probably quite empty in its sugary sweetness. His character—well I had never bothered to think much about that; all I knew was someone who was tender to tiny children, and was crucified, and who died so long ago, and so far away, that it did not seem to matter.

I knew that I ought to believe that He was the Son of God; that He was God Himself come down to earth to redeem mankind; but the plain truth is that, like most people, I did not bother myself about Him at all. It was an old, old story that happened long ago,

and He appeared to have very little to do with a Dorset farm or the world of to-day.

Ask yourself whether you really do believe that He is the Son of God. Do it honestly, face up to the issue, and, if you are perfectly frank with yourself, you will come to about the same conclusion that I did; you don't believe it or disbelieve it, it does not seem to matter very much. Of course, like myself, if you were asked the question in public you would say that you did so believe; it is not decent to do otherwise, and people might think you a queer sort of person if you openly stated your disbelief. In any case, you probably don't bother yourself sufficiently to disbelieve—the matter does not concern you. You would be very uncomfortable and resentful about being asked the question at all.

But do you believe that the Lord Christ was really God? That He came down from heaven to be born of a virgin in Palestine? That He taught a way of life, and that, finally, He was crucified to save us all from the Devil? That He rose again from the dead on the third day after His execution? You will be a singularly contented man if you can honestly answer "yes" to all these questions and really mean them. You will have "the gift of faith", whatever that strange phrase may mean.

I read all that I could on the question, both from the clergyman's point of view, as well as from that of the logical disbeliever, and, very reluctantly, in the winter of 1937, I had to answer all of them in the negative. I am not pretending that that made the slightest difference to me, for it didn't; but I was left with the

deep desire that I should really understand what the teaching of the Master might mean to me personally.

There was one great compensation—if I could not believe in the divinity of the Lord Christ—by which I mean that I found it impossible to hold Him as God Almighty, for that is what the term Son of God must mean if you strip away all the fal-lals which two thousand years of hair-splitting theologians have wrapped around that stark personality—I found something else. By reading His reported words, even if the Gospels as we know them were written long after His death, and, in some cases, set down by persons who had never seen Him, I found that I was groping dimly and dumbly towards the greatest personality in all history.

I tried to read His words as solid, literal pronouncements; to tear down all the tinsel interpretations which priests and demagogues have made—you know, the sort of thing you see above the columns in the Gospels, such as "Christ is the true bread of Life"—or in the Song of Solomon, "Christ's love for His church", and the like—and I found that I was reading a teaching that, if practised, would melt all the doubts and fears which beset us. We should not be taxed up to the hilt or armaments, nor be going into Bridport to see anti-air-drill, or hearing so much about air-raid precautions, but this sober, common sense which He spoke near two thousand years ago was only practised in this crazy, war-stricken world of ours.

Most people must be very like myself—we have never really heard what He did say. The Church must be blamed for sickening us with forced feeding when

we were too young to defend ourselves. I never read Scott, Thackeray or Dickens—I just can't abide them, because they were thrust down my gorge when I was a lad—and I suppose the Bible must be in the same class.

When you get old enough to pick and choose your own reading you don't take kindly to stuff which gives you the same revulsion that you get from cod-liver oil, because you were nauseated by forcible feeding at school. The parallel is good—I see advertisements in the papers nowadays which say that cod-liver oil is available in tempting forms—so is the Bible—you know perfectly well that both will do you good and that you ought, for your own sake, to take them. But do you? Of course you don't.

One other thing kills the Bible for most of us. The mumbo-jumbo which has been built like a hedge around it. That phrase "Holy Writ" does more to damn it than anything else. Superstition's the word for which I am looking—aye, it *is* superstitious the way we look at the Book—if we look at it at all, and do not prefer to ignore it as something stuffy and uncomfortable. I reckon that our religious teachers have been all wrong in the way in which they have put it before us.

This business of "texts" for one thing—you can prove, or disprove, anything by tearing a few words out of their context. No, if we want to relish this great literary treasure which most of us own, stowed away in some dim corner of a dusty and forgotten shelf in our homes, we have got to discover it for ourselves, in the same way that Janet and I did.

We went further, for, after we had finished with the authorized version, I bought a copy of the Douai Version, the one used by the Roman Church, and found it as delightful in its language, with the added attraction of having several more of the ancient books within its covers. The tales of Judith, of Tobias and his pet dog, and of the Wars and heroism of the Maccabees ought to be in our English Bible.

Better still, those Books of Maccabees filled the long gap between the end of Malachi and the beginning of Matthew. That carried us forward, and made us want to know more about this land of Palestine. To my delight I found an ancient chronicle written by a Jewish general who was captured by the Romans—Josephus, and I revelled in him nearly as much as I had done in the Bible.

Another book carried us onwards from Bible times, Milman's *History of the Jews*, but I left that after the end of Chapter, or Book, as the author calls it, 23. By that time we were out of Palestine and into the ages of the Crusades.

Quite by chance a volume from the County Library at Dorchester arrived, Lamb's *Iron Men and Saints*, and that gave me a taste to read some of the Crusaders' own diaries. First, I bought the Lord of Joinville's *Chronicle of the Expedition of St. Louis, King of France*. Then I got a copy of Stevenson's *Crusaders in the East*, helped by Archer's *History of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*.

"Everyman's Library" editions of Joinville and of other Crusader, Villehardouin (though I dropped is one when I found that he had done his fighting



around Constantinople) are good and cheap. The *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, an English knight who went to Palestine, was enthrallingly interesting. Once again the *Encyclopædia Britannica* came in extremely useful with its short biographies of the people I found mentioned in the histories.

There was the same charm about all these old tales that I had found in the Bible. They were accounts of events which had happened long ago, written by men who had taken part in them.

Just before we were due to start I finished up my very nodding acquaintance with the country I was to visit, by reading the later history of Palestine. It was not very stirring, mainly a long account, which I could not understand, of squabbles between chieftains and pashas, and rebellions against the Sultan. One bit of luck I did have, I found the best account of how Napoleon marched into Palestine and besieged Sir Sidney Smith and his British sailors and marines at St. John of Acre, in a boy's book, *Aboukir and Acre* by G. A. Henty.

It sounds a pile of very stuffy reading, I know, and I suppose that if I had not been going to see the country I should hardly have bothered about it. But it is going to have one permanent effect—I am going to collect as many of these old chronicles of stirring events as I can gather. In the long winter evenings I shall have something really interesting into which to sink my mental teeth, though, of course, I shall still read lighter books to keep my balance.

And, though it may sound strange, I did not get bloated with mental conceit. I very soon realized that

should not live sufficiently long, if I went on to a  
nativity like great-grandfather did, even to learn the  
ham off what I should like to know. A farmer has  
ough to do to scramble for his living these days.  
I only in the winter is there any time for reading  
all. Still, I shall learn all that I can. I will try not  
form any conclusions until I have heard every side  
the question, and be ready to change them when  
er folk than myself convince me that I have been  
ing up the wrong tree.

ext winter I am going to tackle the Bible again.  
e thoroughly, and I shall be helped to understand  
y what I have seen in the country about which it  
written.

## CHAPTER TWO

IT is surprising how cheaply you can travel if you don't crave accommodation on the *Queen Mary* scale, especially when you have only yourself to consider, and no loved woman with you to whom you consider the world owes its best, for at the last moment Janet decided to go on a cruise to Madeira. I was more than willing, for the disturbances in the Holy Land did not make it too attractive for a woman.

I booked my return passage from London to Alexandria for fifteen pounds! Doubt that, if you like, it still remains a fact. Janet sailed from Southampton in one of the crack Union Castle ships, and she looked bonny in her new rig—she and Joan, her sister, had had a week in the West End before she started.

I sailed from the East India docks aboard a large cargo-ship, which I will call the *Bradstock* because that is not her name. There are many things about being a passenger in a cargo-ship which make a voyage quite different, and far more interesting, than being aboard a liner. You get into close contact with the captain and his officers, you see the wheels actually going round, the daily routine of the ship in action. A lot depends upon yourself—if they like you, you will have a very enjoyable time—if they don't, you will be driven right in on yourself, and I guess if that

the sort of person you are the company will be none so congenial.

The *Bradstock's* captain and officers were as fine a bunch of men as I have ever met. They knew that I was a Dorset farmer, and when they found that I did not mind having my leg pulled about walking with one leg in the plough's furrow, we made friends.

My cabin was as good as anything in a crack Atlantic liner—there was a bathroom attached, which I shared with the captain, for I lived in the midship superstructure, immediately below the chartroom. I soon learned the joys, however, after we had got near Gibraltar, of tumbling out naked on to the deck in the very early morning, and letting the boatswain ice me down with the salt-water hose as his men were scrubbing the decks.

I had had a tip or two before coming aboard. Four dozen Whitbreads and four dozen pint-bottles of Bass alongside three bottles of John Haig and three of mouth gin in the steward's pantry, so that I could invite the captain, or the officers and engineers to join me occasionally in my cabin—and that added to the pleasure of my approach to my new shipmates.

The *Bradstock* had a passenger license, so that I had not had to go to the shipping-office and sign articles as a member of the crew at a wage of one shilling per month, the usual way by which the law is evaded when a man pays for his passage on a cargo-ship.

It was a very pleasant voyage—I have always hated the conventionalism of having to encase myself into an uncomfortable shirt and suit to eat a meal, and on the *Bradstock* there was no need for evening

dress. Better still, there were no blistered blondes wishful for a desultory flirtation, and no confounded male nuisances to make themselves "the life and soul of the ship", and to pester you into taking part in deck-sports, when all you want is to sit quiet.

I lived and enjoyed every moment of that voyage. Cape St. Vincent, Trafalgar Bay and the grey Rock of Gibraltar crouched at the Mediterranean Gate. There was a thrill in identifying little grey-painted fishing-boats as fighting-ships enforcing Franco's blockade. Once we saw, just east of Gibraltar, two aircraft circling and diving on to three of these armed trawlers, and the second officer, who was on watch, told me that they were Spanish Government machines engaging Nationalist ships. A strange thing to be sitting there in almost perfect safety, to see the flashes of the ship's guns, and an occasional heavy splash as an air-bomb fell into the water close alongside them. Men hard at it in this crazy, stupid game of war and murder, with myself in a ringside seat.

When we had passed, at a respectful distance, the aircraft were winging their way towards the north-east, back to their bases at Almeria or Cartagena. Every eye was alert on our ship for the white wakes of pirate torpedoes, and, for an hour or two, a long lean, low-hulled British destroyer, one of those engaged on the Nyon Agreement patrol, escorted us whilst she talked away genially with her wig-wagging semaphore.

It was very pleasant to sit in the saloon in the evenings and to hear the yarns of these men who had followed the sea from their boyhood. Funny, most

of them seemed to think that farming is an ideal life, and every man Jack swore that his one ambition was to make enough to be able to buy a small farm and to settle down as far from the sea as he could get. The mate spun the old yarn of putting a pair of oars over his shoulder and walking on, always inland, until he met someone who didn't know what he was carrying. By the time I had finished telling them what farming is really like, they decided to stick to the sea.

I left them in Alexandria; the ship was going to be there for a couple of weeks, and then was to go on to Port Sudan on the Red Sea to load more cargo, before she returned to Alexandria to complete her lading. That would allow me a month in which to see all that could of Palestine.

Cook's office in Alexandria gave me all the particulars I needed about the journey to Palestine, and decided upon making it by aeroplane. A company called Misr Airways runs a regular service and, as I wanted to see all that I could, the air seemed to be the best place from which to do so. The ship was a mess of heat and dust as she lay in the basin, so I moved up to the Windsor Hotel for the night, as there was no aircraft flying on the Palestine route until the following morning.

Two Royal Air Force officers, with whom I spent the evening, thought that I was mad to go to Palestine. Excellent fellows, they really meant well—both of them had been on special duty up there. Their tales of ambushes, sudden attacks, bombing, and machine-gunning Arabs from the air, were certainly frightening, but I had come all this way to see the

Holy Land, and now that I was on its front doorstep I was not going to turn back.

Next morning I was called early, and after snatching a hasty breakfast of ham and eggs as good as I could have had in West Dorset, I clambered into a single-decked bus, and was driven out, the only passenger, to the flying-field on the sands to the west of the city. There I was weighed, my tickets were checked, and I was conducted in solitary state to a white painted twin-engined air-liner waiting on the levelled sand, a few yards from the wooden steps of the pavilion.

As we rose I glanced over the side and saw the great city and port spread out below. Strange, Alexandria had seemed a huge place as I drove through it, it looked small enough from five thousand feet in the air. Straight below us was a large shallow lake, and the effect looking down on to it was extremely curious. You could not see the surface of the water, but only the weed-grown and sandy bottom, so that the fishing-boats at work upon it looked as though they were suspended in mid-air.

Next, glancing ahead, I saw the fat snake of a river winding through the flat lands, and a little shiver of delight crept down my spine as I realized that it was the Nile. I'm not going into any rhapsodies about that ancient stream of romance, or about Pharaohs and Ptolemies, I was more interested in noting the intensive farming of the black land down below. The Delta, from my height, looked exactly like a huge Axminster carpet, all regular squares and oblongs, with a few villages scattered about on little knolls. There were paths and canals everywhere, though it was difficult

to tell road from water, and I found that I could only do so by watching for the bridges.

Over to the left there was a range of low black rocky hills, and, beyond them, the pale-gold of the Mediterranean beaches. Ahead showed another river, and from my readings of de Joinville I knew that I was looking down on to the Damietta Mouth of the Nile. It was not ancient Crusaders fighting dysentery, inefficiency and savage Paynims who filled my mind, but the busy teeming life of those peasant farmers down below, men who filled the same station in life as I did. I could see them, little insignificant dots working in their rectangular fields, and I felt more at home with them than I did with the keen-faced young Scotsman sitting in front of me, piloting our machine.

It was very comfortable. It was cool, and there was no dust or smells. The engines out on the wings looked friendly, as they sang a song of sweet, controlled power pleasant to hear. There was so much to see that there was no time to be scared, and I made a pleasant diversion in arranging the opening in the shiny aluminium tube which controlled the ventilation, a stream of cool air rushing in with our hurtling speed. It was not bumpy, there was not nearly so much sensation of motion as in my own Vauxhall 14 in Dorset, and, when I had read and practised the directions about air-sickness and the effect of managing the ventilation, I felt quite happy and took my eyes off the sinister brown paper-bags hanging ready for use.

We crossed the Damietta stream and headed over a wide, shallow, very muddy lake which stretched to the eastern horizon. A few slimy-sided islets stood in



it, covered with coarse grass—a number of native-rigged fishing-boats sailed on its filthy surface. A dark line on the eastern sky-rim I recognized as the Suez Canal—the main artery of our empire. A pile of houses, looking like a heap of dried packing-cases, showed ahead, and from the excellent map provided by the Air Line I knew that I was gazing at Port Said. I recalled some of Uncle Gurth's lurid stories of this town which had been the cesspool of the world, but then remembered having read somewhere or another, that it had now been cleaned up and most of its abominations removed.

To my sudden, horror-stricken surprise the steady beat of the engines ceased, and a gentle sougning took its place. I grabbed the sides of the chair in sheer, heart-sick helplessness, believing that we were going to make a forced landing in that dirty lake. In any case, I reflected, the water would not be very cold, and I could swim; there were two fishing-boats about a mile away. No one had bothered to tell me that I must change planes at Port Said, and to my lay eye there was nothing that looked like a landing-ground. On a narrow sandy isthmus not half a mile wide, stretching between the end of the lake and the sea-beach, stood a corrugated-iron shed. Then I saw a stumpy mast with a wind-sock flying from it, and my heart started to beat again—we were making a regular landing, not going to crash.

I stepped out and down, helped by a very courteous negro giant in a scarlet tarboosh and jersey, and then I was asked to go over to the shed, where some Egyptian officials in blue uniforms examined my passport

nd asked me a lot of questions as to my reasons for visiting Palestine. One man, with some gold stripes in his cuffs, wanted to know if I had not heard of the serious trouble up there, and suggested that I would have a far better time in Cairo. I was inclined to agree with him, but, after all, it was the Holy Land that I wished to see.

After a few minutes another white aircraft came winging in—the plane from Cairo which was to take me to Lydda aerodrome, between Jaffa and the Mountains of Judea, on the Plain of Sharon, whilst the Alexandria machine would carry on to Cairo.

Once again I was in the air. Port Said passed below, a hideous collection of ramshackle hovels at the eastern end, and of large, flat-roofed, miniature skyscrapers at the opposite extremity. The long mole of the canal entrance jutted tenuously into the blue sea, with a statue of de Lesseps at the shoreward end. There were many ships in the harbour, and I saw others in the straight lane of the waterway which divides Asia from Africa. It is a strange feeling to cross the border between continents, more especially when that frontier is the one between the ancient kingdom of the Nile and the Desert of Sinai, the front door-step of the Holy Land.

Port Said as seen from the air is a strange and isolated spot. It looks exactly like a giant edition of a rubbish-heap set down in the middle of disused gravel-pits. There is water, dirty, unhealthy looking water to west, south and east, and the blue of the Mediterranean on the north—you wonder where on earth the inhabitants go for relaxation in the

evenings—until you meet them, and then you know.

We flew steadily eastwards, over a long spit of sand which divided the inshore lake from the sea—it is called the Bardawil Peninsula. To the left there was nothing but sea—to the right naught but yellow desert—below some fishermen on the sand-spit were resting with their boats drawn up beyond the reach of the water. It is a depressing sight, nothing but barrenness, not a sign of life. Far away snaked a thin black line—another consultation of the map, and I recognized the iron track of the Palestine Railway which connects the Holy Land with Egypt, Jerusalem with Alexandria, Cairo and Port Said.

The Desert of Sinai! Well, if that was the place where the Israelites spent forty years in continual wandering, I could admire their courage but not their choice of stamping-grounds. Of course, they were much farther to the south, down amongst the mountains in the triangle between the Gulf of Arabia and the Red Sea proper, but if it was anything like this, nothing but the most strenuous divine protection could have pulled them through.

There could not have been the vast horde which I have always pictured—the country could not support them and their stock. If there had been originally a huge host of Israelites, they must have split-up, and in that desert there could have been mighty little contact between the detachments.

I had noticed the pilot writing—he passed me back a scrawled note.

“Bardawil Peninsula below. Some say it was here that Pharaoh’s army was overwhelmed by the waters.

Have often seen sea breaching right across it in sudden storms. They may be right."

That was a new thought to me. Bit of a shock, too. [I had been rather sceptical about that Crossing of the Red Sea, and even more of the explanation I had seen in some commentaries about a wind piling up the waters. Wind just couldn't do that long enough to allow a host to cross, and to keep the passage dry until a pursuing army was deeply enough involved to be overwhelmed. But this was different. Moses and his followers might, easily, have marched along the Bardawil Peninsula, and Pharaoh's Frontier Force, guarding the borders, have been swept away by a sudden storm. The Arthur Legends of our own are enough to show how a dim historical episode can be twisted. Maybe the old scribes were right enough in what they described, the Egyptian Border Police may really have met with disaster.

I do not disbelieve in miracles, nor do I doubt that Almighty God can work them if He so chooses, but, when a thing can be done by physical means, it seems impious to think that He has to exert His power to interrupt the whole course of Nature. Yes, that was a fine idea, I would go to these places and try to resolve my difficulties about miracles. I had dismissed, in my ignorance of local conditions, so much in the scriptures as the pious frauds of zealous scribes and priests. I was probably wrong; they may have been honest enough, and it may be the fault of others that their truthful accounts have been ruined by the enthusiasm of people who came after them, concocting twisted legends of actual events.

That, and a really comprehensive attempt to see all that I could of this great ideal of rebuilding the National Home for the Jews, as well as to study the way in which we Britons are pursuing the work that our ancestors of the Crusade had found beyond their powers, would give me plenty to do in the month I had at my disposal.

A large town appeared, standing on a long ridge; in front of it ran the line of the railway amongst groves of palm trees. In several places I saw long caravans of camels winding their way towards the city. The pilot passed back another note.

"El Arish," it read, "capital of Sinai. We are now approaching the Palestine border. Next town is Gaza."

### CHAPTER THREE

WE were now flying farther out over the sea. The sand-dunes stretched their yellow ribs miles away the right; there was nothing but blue water below. We struck the coast again above Gaza, a huddle of low-brown houses and white domes, with an odd minaret or two jutting above the squat-roofed city. Long lines of cultivation straggled in every direction; close to the surf from which a ramshackle jetty thrust its tottering nose, the ranks of trees petered out in the choking sand. Along well-tramped tracks camel-caravans and motor-lorries were crawling, whilst a white plume of steam on the long black snake of the railway marked a train working in the station siding. The soil had changed from the yellow sand of Sinai to a wondrous reddish-mauve. To eastward in long, level, dusty flats, obscured by distant sand-clouds, stretched away towards Beersheba. Southern Palestine does not seem an inviting place for any who wish to win their living from the soil, but, if there is water to be found at a workable depth, it could be made a Garden of Heaven, for soil that has lain fallow for centuries must be a farmer's Paradise.

The pilot was a man and a friend, he went to a lot of trouble to keep me informed, passing notes to me as we flew northwards. I made out Ascalon, but before I had time to spare a thought for all that had happened

there, from Philistine times to those of Allenby, I had another note to read.

Dead ahead lay a large city, shimmering white—Ramleh, with its strange ancient tower, the red-brick buildings of the Royal Air Force barracks and hangars, beside it. A last note from the pilot.

“Lydda aerodrome ahead. That is Ramleh. Supposed to be Arimathea—doubtful,” I read. “Ruined tower is that of the Forty Martyrs.”

The Forty Martyrs meant nothing to me, I had never heard of them, but the ruined building marks the church which Sir John Mandeville, so we read, visited in the fourteenth century, and, if Ramleh was Arimathea, then here was a link with my own West Country, with Glastonbury, where, so legend says, Joseph of Arimathea founded the first Christian Church in Britain.

Just beyond the olive-groves and orchards were lines of camps, where some of the British garrison is concentrated—the men who are carrying on the duties which their forebears so honourably commenced and so dishonourably abandoned in the days of the Crusades.

The engines died, and the same gentle southing which had so scared me over an hour before back at Port Said, rose like a sigh as we glided down to land on the Lydda field. It was quickly evident that things were not quiet and peaceful in the Holy Land; the aerodrome was partly charred ruins, though workmen were hard at it repairing the damage which the Arabs caused when they set fire to the buildings.

A lot of armed men lounged about—men who wore blue puggarees round their sun-helmets, and as I got

but one of them came up and spoke to me. He was a constable of the British Police, a native of a village near Crewkerne, not a score of miles from my own farm. I tried to get some first-hand news of what was happening in Palestine, but I had to desist; the poor chap wanted all the latest gossip of Yeovil, of Mister-on, and of his home.

I took a glance at the heavy revolver in his belt, and at the armed sentries round the barbed-wire rected near the office buildings, but I was forced back to the Somerset-Dorset border. It was not until I had answered his questions that he suddenly thought of his errand; he had a letter for me from Edgar. Only when he remembered that I was a relative of one of his officers, did he come back to the present.

"Sorry, John," said Edgar's note. "I can't get away to-day as I have to be at the Military Court. In any case, I am stationed near Haifa in the north, and leave is mighty hard to get these days. I suggest that you stay on the plane and come on to Haifa, you will find it safer than the train or the road. I will try to meet you at the landing-ground, but if I cannot manage it, I will send a British sergeant to bring you to my quarters."

I had intended to get to Jerusalem as soon as possible, but, after all, I had nearly a month to do it, and I might as well go north and see Edgar first. It was quite easy to book a seat for the further stage. I was still the only passenger, as I seemed to have picked an off-day in air-travel.

The constable sidled up again, and we were soon deep into Dorset affairs. It had one good effect, how-



ever; when he realized my intense interest in the country, he sent a native boy over to his quarters, and I was presented with a copy of the best guide-book to Palestine, written by Meistermann, a Franciscan Friar, and mighty useful I found it.

After my passport had been inspected and I had received official permission to reside for three months in the Holy Land, I climbed back into my seat again, and in a few minutes we were off. I sat with my Meistermann on my knee, prepared to enjoy myself.

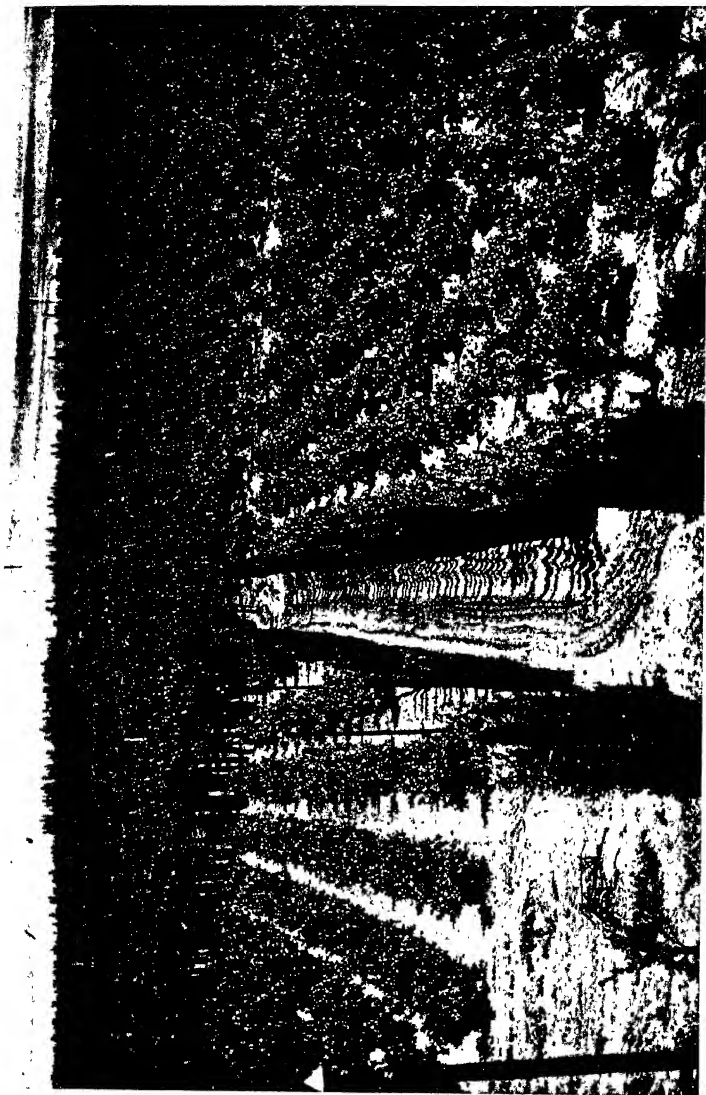
"We'll keep fairly high, Mr. Harding," said the pilot. "There is no real danger, but you can never tell if some Arab sportsman in the hills is feeling festive enough to try a pot-shot. I guess they can't tell the difference between this and an R.A.F. machine."

An uncomfortable thought. The thin floor of the air-liner was not exactly bullet-proof. I surely had arrived in the Holy Land!

He grinned as he caught my look. "Don't worry," he said. "It's a million to one against our being hit, and, in any case, it's a hundred-to-six against anyone firing at us."

From over five thousand feet I received a clear impression of what the Jews were doing in Palestine towards rebuilding their National Home. The contrast between the green areas of their farming, and the rest of the land about was only too obvious. A large city lay a few miles away on the left, and my map told me that it was the twin-towns of Jaffa and Tel Aviv, the latter the Jewish capital.

A broad band of cultivation and of clean, white



A MODEL ORANGE GROVE



houses spread north from Tel Aviv—one Jewish village after another. All the way up the Plain of Sharon it was the same. Areas of intensive farming, interspersed with fallow stretches. The Mountains of Samaria lay to the left, grey, stony, wild and sprinkled with hill-top Arab villages. We crossed the ruins of a four-square castle. I had already found its name on the map when the pilot's note arrived.

"Ras el Ain Castle below. Head of the new Jerusalem water-supply. Was Antipatris where Paul's escort waited up. Crusaders built Castle Mirabel here. Over to the left front is battle-field of Arsuf where Lion-heart fought Saladin, beside that ruined castle, half-left on the sea-cliffs. Town on distant right is Tulkarm, at the opening of valley to Samaria-Shechem."

On we went, while the Plain grew narrower, as the mountain-chain came closer to the sea-shore. We passed close to a large square of ruins on the beach and amongst the sand-hills. I traced the outlines of a great abandoned city. Another note.

"Caesarea down below. Once capital in Roman days. You ought to go and see it. Most of the towers and walls are Crusader—St. Louis. Paul ate his heart out down there. Worth a visit."

Just north of Caesarea the Plain grows narrower still. On the crest of the hills stood a Jewish town, Sharon Yaquv, one of the oldest of the new settlements—a pre-War colony. We flew on up the narrow strip between mountains and Mediterranean. A vast ruined castle stood on a peninsula, its tumbled walls washed by the creaming surf. Near it was a colony, and a wide salt-pans, and several railway sidings;

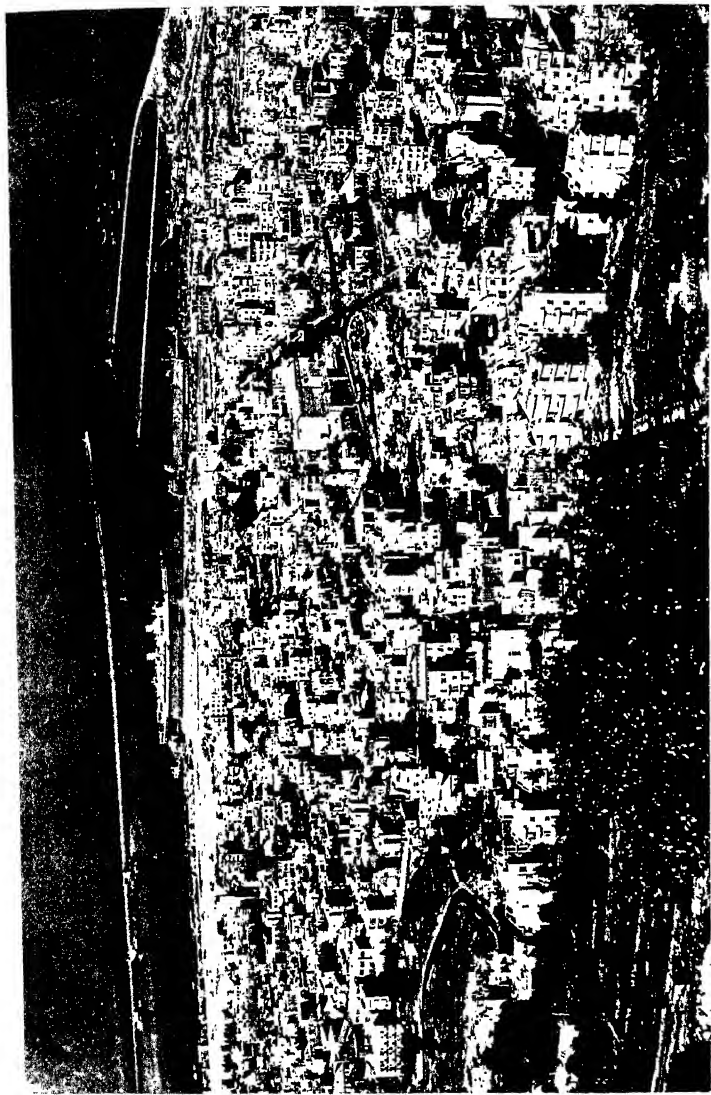
facing it the foothills were seamed and gashed with fresh quarry-workings.

"Athlit—Castle Pilgrim," ran the pilot's note. "Last place in Palestine held by the Crusaders. Quarries are those from which the new port of Haifa was built. Mount Carmel ahead and to the right."

By now my mind was in a whirl. I had no time to give more than a passing look to any of the places over which we were speeding. Castle Pilgrim, Caesarea and the rest, with all that the Acts of the Apostles and Joinville have to say about them. The name of Mount Carmel filled my brain. It is a long hog-back, highest above Athlit, thence slowly sloping to the bold and lofty headland which cut off my view northward. It was of no use looking on that seventeen-mile ridge for the crest where Elijah had his argument with the priests of Baal. I had imagined Carmel to be an ordinary sort of hill, something like Glastonbury Tor, but this was quite different.

Before I had time to worry much about it, we had crossed the mountain's seaward shoulder, and a mighty city lay below—Haifa. A harbour nearly as fine as that of Alexandria had been built, its stones still showing how new it was. Haifa lies squeezed between the steep sides of Carmel and the southern end of the bay, which is the first irregularity on the coastline all the way from Port Said.

We drifted down to the landing-ground on the flat land at the city's northern outskirts, not far from the winding river Kishon. I was glad to see the uniformed figure of Edgar waiting beside the air-line offices. I tumbled out to greet him, and then turned back to



GENERAL VIEW OF HAIFA, SHOWING JEWISH QUARTER



a the pilot if he would have lunch with me as some  
r k of my gratitude to him for all his decency  
c the trip, but he declined, saying that his work  
v ld keep him near the machine until he started the  
r rn journey.

f all the flights which commercial pilots regularly  
n e, can you think of one to compare with this—  
C o, Alexandria, Port Said, the Sinai Desert and the  
F y Land? I can't.



## CHAPTER FOUR

EDGAR had taken rooms for me in the Stella Maris Hospice, part of the Carmelite Monastery, situated right at the end of the mountain-shoulder above the sea. The lighthouse is built upon its roof. He showed me how I might see all that I wanted of Palestine, have the very best of accommodation, service and food, and yet spend less than a fifth of what hotels would cost me. The Franciscan Friars, and other religious Orders, own hospices for the use of the thousands of pilgrims who come to the Holy Land in normal years. A few years ago, up till 1930, in fact, they were the best accommodation available.

I said that I was not a member of the Roman Church, and I had no wish to take advantage of the privileges it provided for its own people, but he told me that the good monks make no difference between their own folk and those belonging to other churches. He said that, because the disturbances had frightened so many would-be pilgrims, I should have the very best rooms offered to me, as none of the Hospices were at all likely to be overcrowded. There was no bill tendered to you when you ended your stay—you paid whatever you could afford, or what you thought adequate for the hospitality you had received.

I was rather astonished at this trustful procedure,



*Photo. American Colony in Jerusalem*

## MOUNT CARMEL AND HAIFA BAY

Carmelite Monastery on extreme right spur of mountain



asked him what happened when some selfish person refused to pay anything. Edgar laughed.

They get just the same consideration and courtesy as the best-paying pilgrim receives," he replied. "The monks ask for nothing, except the chance to show people to see the Holy Places. If anyone is too mean and ungrateful to pay, they say good-bye to him with as much cordiality as if he had given them a thousand pounds, and pray that God'll give him a better disposition."

It seems rather incredible in these hard commercial days—but I found that it was a fact—one more facet of the bluff mediævalism which is Palestine, despite its towers and electric power pylons.

The Stella Maris Hospice is the equal of any hotel. Its bedrooms are comfortably furnished, clean and airy. The food and service is excellent, and the bearded Father Guest-master affable, courteous and dignified. Never once during the whole of my visit to Palestine did the monks make any suggestion that I should avail myself of their services.

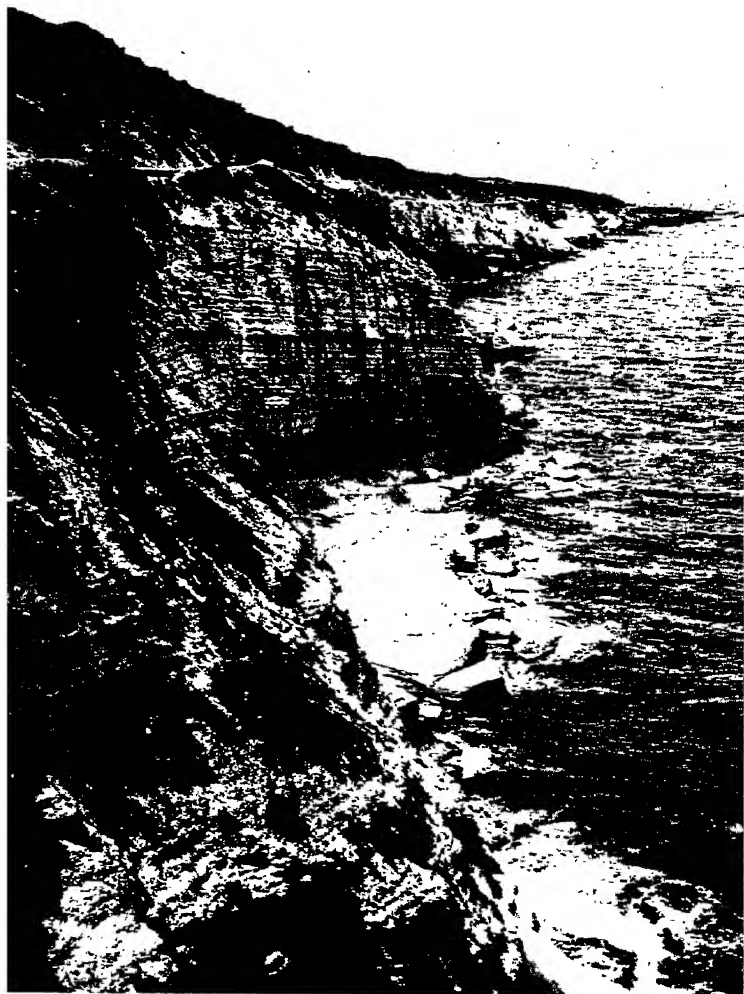
Edgar warned me of the danger on the roads, especially up here in northern Palestine, but he said that I should be safe enough if I kept in the better-lighted part of the towns after dark had fallen. In any case, the Arabs were not likely to harm me if they recognized me as a simple visitor—they were only too anxious to enlist sympathy for their cause on the part of travelling Englishmen. The one risk was that they might mistake me for an officer in plain clothes—they might bump into some out-and-out brigand gang, for there were plenty of criminals making hay whilst

the sun shone, taking advantage of the struggle being waged by the patriots.

The view from my windows on Mount Carmel was superb. Haifa lay below me just as it had done from the portholes of the air-liner, spread out like a large-scale map. I could see the ships in the great new harbour, and the houses and streets clustering together on the narrow space between mountain and shore. The northern horizon was blocked by a long ridge ending in a white cliff. This was the Ladder of Tyre marking the northern frontier of the country.

On the far side of the bay a city stood with the feet of its yellow walls and bastions in the water, and the Father Guest-master told me that I was looking at St. John of Acre, a magic name enough. Above Acre the mountains of Galilee went tumbling up to the sky. I was shown the sharp peak which marks the site of Jotapata, the fortress which Josephus the Historian defended against the Romans.

I was continually encountering places and things which connected England with Palestine. I do not mean the English crusaders who fought at Acre, though that is the strongest link of all, but places and things like this Jotapata. That peak was stormed by the troops of Vespasian, who afterwards became Emperor of Rome—but where had Vespasian served his apprenticeship to the art of storming hill-forts? Down in Dorset, of course. With his Second Legion, a few years previously, he had broken through the mighty ramparts of Eggardun, Pillsdun, Maydun, Quarr and a few score similar hill-cities of our Celtic forefathers. Here, a mighty long way from home, I was looking



*Photo. American Colony in Jerusalem*

### THE LADDER OF TYRE

Over this pass Allenby's army followed up  
and attacked the Turks



ough my bedroom window at another hill which  
pasian had assaulted, just as I was accustomed to  
ng Eggardun every morning as I was dressing at  
le.

hanks to the good Carmelites, and to Edgar, I was  
wn everything worth seeing around Haifa. One of  
t monks was going to the Monastery of the Sacrifice,  
asked if I would like to go with him. I accepted  
c the spot, offering to pay the hire of the car, and  
c ying my point.

he monk spoke excellent English, and turned out  
t be the best of companions. Edgar told me that I  
d fear no interference from the Arabs so long as I  
v in the company of the man in the brown habit,  
s ular and cowl.

ve drove down the long sloping road from the  
l pice, and passed through the gates at the bottom,  
v re tolls are usually charged, for this road was built  
l g before the British occupation. It was the gift  
c South American Republic, and is the property of  
t Carmelites. Then, passing through the German  
C ony we entered the town.

he German Colony is a beautiful place of tree-lined  
s ets, well laid-out and clean, with substantial stone-  
b t houses. These Germans came to Palestine during  
t last century, and the present inhabitants are the  
c endants of those who came here to wait, in prayer,  
b l labour and good works, for the end of the world.  
T y have prospered mightily, not only from their  
f ing activities, and the now valuable properties  
t own, but because, from the end of the War, this  
h been the quarter in which the British officials have



lived. Or, at least, did live, so I understand, until the new roads were built to the top of Carmel, and the better class moved up there, where it is cool and pleasant, far different from the stifling summer-heat of the city.

Haifa becomes meaner and uglier as you run along the eastern streets, which finally lead you on to Nazareth; but once you are clear of the last houses, it is as beautiful a road, at least as I saw it in early March, as any in my own West country. The slopes of Carmel go steeply upwards from the right, whilst a broad plain stretches away on the left, almost as far as the eye can see until it is abruptly stopped by the distant Ladder of Tyre.

Carmel's flanks were clad in a waving carpet of tall hollyhocks, as fine and stately as any that grow in our cottage gardens at home, but here flourishing wild and untended. Father Elias saw me looking at them.

"It is a good name your English one for the *Althæa Rosea*," he said. "Hollyhock, you call it, is it not? Have you ever thought why it has that title?"

I hadn't, though it has always been a very favourite flower of mine, and Janet's hollyhocks are as good as any in Dorset.

"Holly for 'holy'," said the monk, "and hock from a Saxon word, I believe, meaning a mallow. It was called Holy because it came from this Holy Land; some Crusader gardener must have taken seeds home from Carmel's flanks to sow in his own garden."

On the flat land between us and the mountain, and sweeping across the plain, lay a glory of scarlet and smoky blue flowers, which I mistook from the car to

be poppies, great masses and sheets of them, smoulder-  
 in fiery-red, or lying like blankets of pearly-grey  
 w smoke flattened to undulations of the green,  
 -gr smothered land.

Jo, they are not poppies," said my monk. " They  
 ar that you call anemones, though, strictly speaking,  
 th are not, but Hepaticas. They are of the same  
 far y, so what does the name matter? They are  
 be iful, are they not?" He sighed. " They make me  
 sac or their life is so short; by the middle of April  
 all is glowing majesty of greenery and flowers will  
 be ught but parched and barren desolation. These  
 we the lilies of the field, Mr. Harding, to which the  
 Lo referred, and yet, and yet—" he sighed—" how  
 goc is God, to give us even this fore-glimpse of His  
 hor "

h renewed interest I looked round. A strange  
 feel trickled down my spine, for here was my first  
 con t with the Personality of the Master. That  
 carj of wild-flowers, more gorgeous a display, though  
 tenc by no human care, than any I have ever seen,  
 and n not excepting the tulip meadows of Lincoln-  
 shir or the daffodil-fields of Cornwall, brought Him  
 for first time close to my shoulder. Certainly, as  
 He nself said, nothing that Solomon in all his glory  
 ever ore, could compare with that mantle of wood-  
 smo and flame-spread at Carmel's foot, and surging  
 up ( mel's rock-ribbed shoulders.

It is such a natural thing for a wandering Teacher  
 to h e pointed out to his hearers. It brought the  
 who scene so very close; to be perfectly frank, I  
 didn like the feeling it engendered—and yet I did,

somehow. I was scared of "getting religion"—the sort of thing which is dubbed becoming religious back at home, but this was very different.

This was no question of becoming fanatical about some half digested, totally misunderstood Book. The clean wholesome breath of fresh air which these anemones and hollyhocks, brought blowing sweet and new into my mind, coupled with the monk's remark, roused me with an almost physical shock. But then I am not a religious man—at least I am not a sentimental one—and so much of what we call religion is mere sentimentalism, by which word I do not mean sentiment. I have seen Hot Gospellers and so-called "revivalists" at work down in my village, and I once lost a good ploughman and the best shepherd I ever had, through that unfair and sentimental whipping-up of fanaticism appealing to pitiful ignorance, the brutal prostituting of a man's highest aspirations.

An antidote was on its way. After another mile or so, there was an ugly, belching factory—a bit of industrial ugliness set down in the midst of Paradise. It lies just beyond the little village of Yazur, a typical collection of Arab dwellings in an olive grove, merging into a collection of wooden and corrugated-iron shacks, housing the Jewish workmen and Arab quarrymen of the cement factory. Most of the new colonies use a lot of concrete, and this factory fills a tremendous need, but it seems quite out of place at Carmel's foot, on the borders of the Plain of Acre. Jewish Yazur looks like a set from a film of a Wild West cow-town.

We were in a big, powerful American car, an open tourer—a Buick, I believe, driven by a native Chris-

ti of Nazareth, and we were soon at a long stone  
 bridge spanning the Kishon. Just short of it we turned  
 down a side-road which followed the now easterly  
 trail of Carmel, through a narrow pass.

"The road of armies and of emperors!" said the  
 monk. "This is the main gate on to Armageddon, the  
 pass through which conquerors have come and gone  
 for fifty centuries." The stream over which the main-  
 road was carried by the bridge, now lay on our left.  
 It is no wider than a rill in Dorset, certainly not as  
 big as the Asker at Uploders, which I used to jump  
 when I was a lad, but for all that it was none other  
 than that ancient river, the River Kishon. I was not  
 impressed, nor could I see, until the monk told me of  
 its enter fury, how it could have overwhelmed Sisera's  
 chariots.

A knoll just above the bridge is called Hartiyeh;  
 it is once Harosheth of the Gentiles. I was looking  
 at a place where the Lady Jael did her deadly work  
 with the tenpenny nail on the head of the sleeping  
 Sisera.

I looked up the story later in the day, and it took  
 on new life now that I could see exactly how it had  
 happened. The black tents of the Bedouin are still  
 scattered about the plain, and on the lower slopes of  
 the rugged hills close to Hartiyeh. The Plain of Arma-  
 geddon opened up before us, like a vast room seen  
 through an opening door. At a little distance, below some  
 dotted buildings on a knoll at Carmel's foot, the  
 monks stopped the car.

I sat in silence for a moment, gazing at the blue  
 distances of the great rolling plain. It was dotted,

here and there, with the red roofs of Jewish settlements, and broken by the rectangles of growing barley and sprouting wheat. One edge, that in line with our radiator-cap, was the foothills of Samaria; the distant one was the Hills of Galilee. A dome-shaped mountain, close to the Galilean Heights, was Mount Tabor. A grey, far-off cliff was the Hill of Precipitation, near Nazareth. Just visible, jutted the bald cap of Gilboa where King Saul died, whilst in the midst of the plain stood the irregular mass of Little Hermon, on whose flanks, so the monk said, stand Endor and Nain.

A hundred yards away, on the farther side of the Kishon, was a mound about forty feet high, standing by itself, separated from the foothills by the deep cutting of the Hedjaz railway.

"They call it Tel ul Kassis," said the monk quietly; "in English that means the Mound of the Priests. It is where our holy Founder slew the false priests of Baal, after the sacrifice on Carmel's peak above us."

"Our holy Founder?" Then I remembered. These Carmelites have a fervent, pious, and completely untrustworthy legend that Elijah founded their Order, that they are the spiritual descendants of the Schools for the Sons of the Prophets which flourished in Ahab's day. I was looking at the place where the Prophet had slain his vanquished enemies—though even now I don't know whether he did so out of religious zeal, or as a vindictive stroke against their mistress, that very able, and very noble woman, Queen Jezebel.

Now began a crazy, breath-snatching climb up the face of Carmel. The powerful American car roared and raced up the roughest of tracks, turned the most

dangerous hairpin bends, slid and skidded on mud and rough gravel, but at last, when my knuckles were almost bursting through my taut-drawn skin with the convulsive, terror-stricken grasp of agonized apprehension, we stopped below a low cliff, five-sixths of the way up to the white building on the crag above us.

"This is a wonderful spring of water," said the monk, pointing to a trickle at the foot of the rocks. "Even in the severest droughts it never fails. Here our holy father filled the vessels he used to drench his sacrifices."

I looked down to the broad plain below me, and realized that we must be well over a thousand feet above the sea. On we went again, through a forest of scrub oak and low stunted trees, until, with a final roaring of winds, we came to the flat top of the mountain, in front of the blue-painted door of a small monastery.

Two brown-habited Carmelites met us, exchanged greetings with Fra Elias, and then set to work to unload the stores and provisions we had brought. I was taken inside, to a small parlour, the first room on the right in the passage, and there left to my own devices for a few minutes. I spent them in reading

Visitors' Book—it seemed that they had few visitors, and no wonder, for I was even now dreading to return down that breakneck path—one miscalculation on the part of the driver and we should crash hundreds of feet to the plain beneath, and I don't think that even Janet would be able to identify what was left to remain.

Fra Elias and another monk came in a few minutes later, and when they suggested that I should spend the

night at the monastery, I was more than pleased. I had seen all that I wanted of Haifa, and the fresh, cool silence of the mountain appealed strongly to my need of quiet, my wish to grasp all that I was seeing and learning.

## CHAPTER FIVE

NATURALLY the greatest interest of the place lay in its associations with Elijah's Sacrifice. Many people have written about their emotions when they stood upon this highest point of the Carmel hog-back, so I will say little of what I felt. If I had been a very religious man I suppose that I should have concentrated upon the triumph of the True Religion over the priests of the false god, Baal. Somehow I couldn't feel that way about it—I was downright sorry for those poor brutes who were killed for their faith. I could not see them as evil men, as I had been taught to regard them when I was a youngster at school. They must have been completely sincere in their belief in Baal's power to have agreed to the test at—  
the exertions they endured in the stifling heat probably that, at least. Read 1st Kings xviii, verses 17 to 40, and you will see what I mean.

The whole incident appeals to me as far more political than religious. One of those tussles between the spiritual and the temporal powers, and by "spiritual" I mean nothing more of spirituality than one understands by "spiritual peers" in the British House of Lords. In any case Elijah soon found that he had over-reached himself by massacring his professional rivals; outraged Queen Jezebel saw to that.



"Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword.

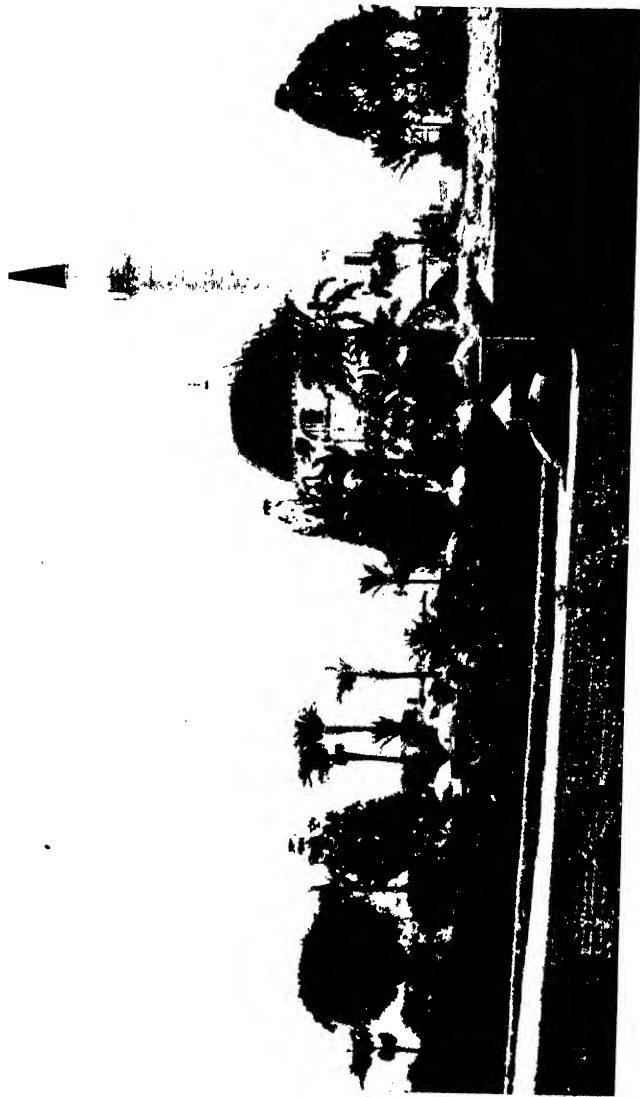
"Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying: 'So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time.'"

And Elijah was so scared that he fled for his life, and was soon so far from being the vengeful, triumphant conqueror exulting over his discomfited and murdered opponents, that he sat down and sighed for death to give him peace.

There are plenty of spurious sites in Palestine, but El Makhrakha, the "Place of Burning", this Monastery of the Sacrifice, is not one of them. It fulfils every requirement of the old story, and there is not much doubt that it was up here, on these rocks, the semi-naked, completely frantic fanatics carried out that stark, blood-stained, sweat-soaked drama. Bar the presence of the small monastery, Carmel peak is much the same as in Elijah's day, and you need but little imagination to picture the whole scene.

I sat on the flat roof, which is reached by a flight of stone stairs running up from the little courtyard at the back of the kitchen, and Fra Elias seated himself beside me.

The view is superb—I have seen naught to equal it. If you turn in a circle starting from west, northwards, thence through east to the south, you see, in turn, the blue Mediterranean, the distant yellow battlements of St. John of Acre, the Ladder of Tyre, the mountains of the Two Galilees, Nazareth on their crest; the



### THE GREAT MOSQUE OF ST. JOHN OF ACRE

Built on the site and incorporating the remains of the Crusading cathedral



oad sweep of Armageddon; dome-shaped Tabor; distant Gadarene hills; Little Hermon; Gilboa; mountains of Samaria, Ebal and Gerizim in the distance; and the whole sweep of the seventeen long Carmel-crest.

Immediately below, at the head of the pass through which passes the Roman road, lies the little hill of Tel Imun, once the township of Jokneam, one of the leaders of the camp of Holofernes on the night when Judith risked all to win immortal fame. Jokneam is mentioned, also, in Joshua xix, verse 11. The tumbled stones of the Crusader fortress on its summit, themselves the remains of the Hebrew houses, have been carried away from the centre; that was done to make space for Napoleon's tent when he came this way, to rest upon his fate before the ancient, battle-pocked, crenelated walls of Acre.

This hill, a low one, juts out on the Samaritan side, commanding all view of the heights beyond—that is Megiddo, on which Deborah sang in Judges v, verse 19. Once it was a great fortress. Ahaziah, King of Judah, was there slain by that Prince of Roadhogs, Jehu. Another Jewish king was killed in action at its foot, for there Jehu met his death at the hands of Pharaoh Necho. Just beyond Megiddo lies the mound which is all that remains of Taanach, its twin-city. I could see the hill above Beisan, the Bethshean where Saul's body was hanged upon the wall—the Scythopolis of Josephus and the Roman War. The places to be seen from Caesarea's top are too numerous to mention, unless one is carrying a guide-book, and I am not making any such attempt.

Armageddon, as I saw it in early March, is beautiful and fertile. The red-tiled roofs of the new Jewish colonies looked clean and prosperous, whilst their fields were well-cared for and lovingly tilled. The rolling, undulating levels of the plain were verdant green, with an occasional copse of trees, a considerable spinney standing on the hills below Nazareth, which I was amused to hear, bore the title of the Balfour National Forest. I shall have to think of calling the copse at the bottom of my eleven-acre pasture by some high-sounding name, if that bunch of trees is a "National Forest".

I am not laughing at those Jews. Palestine certainly does need trees, but they might have chosen some better name for that little wood than "National Forest". You feel a surge of bitter anger welling up inside you when you see the blackened tracks through the young trees, where Arab terrorists have fired them, and wrecked the work of a dozen years in an hour or two.

Up here on Carmel's crest you cannot get away from the grim gaunt figure of stern Elijah. I could see the houses of Zeirin, which was once Jezreel, close on sixteen miles away, but looking very near from my altitude in that clear air. Elijah must have been in the very pink of physical condition—he had endured a whole day of bitter exertion and excitement; he had gone down to that mound, nearly fifteen hundred feet below, to supervise the massacre of his discomfited rivals—then he had climbed back up here to watch for the first rain-cloud—only to go down again, and then run beside a chariot all the way to Jezreel!

could almost see him—a grim, spare man, fiercely  
tall as he padded along in the dust of the chariot-  
wheels. Perhaps he ran as a safety-valve to release his  
pent-up emotions of the day—a tremendous day; he  
had triumphed over his trade rivals; he had had them  
slain; and, most of all, he felt personally responsible  
for having ended the three-year drought. More, he  
was showing Jezebel just what he thought of her and  
her idolatrous Tyrian ways.

He was sorrier for Ahab, standing in his chariot,  
padding across the flat land. So far as I can see, Ahab,  
judged as a king, was a very good and able ruler—at  
least he made a hero's ending, dying for his people,  
bearing the pain of his mortal wounds with the greatest  
courage. Poor Ahab—he had challenged the power of  
the ecclesiastical arm, and like our own Henry the  
Second, he came off second-best. I could almost see  
that strange caravan, rushing across the plain below.  
Always wondering what on earth he was going to say to  
Jezebel to explain why he had not prevented the  
murders of her priests, for Jezebel, a princess of Tyre,  
was too powerful to be placated. He must have looked very  
glumly and resentfully at that gaunt figure padding  
grimly along in the dust, seemingly untirable and  
exceedingly triumphant. Elijah was so sure of himself,  
so completely self-convinced that he was the Sword-  
arm of Jehovah, that he must have been a most un-  
comfortable man to have had near.

It is more that I saw of this Palestine, the more glad  
I became of that intensive reading of mine during the  
war years. If I had read the Bible in the traditional  
British way, I should have seen and felt nothing of all

this—the figures in the Story would have been dim and legendary actors in a “Holy” drama, far removed from all trace of life—but now I was sensing some of them as human beings, real creatures of flesh and blood. The stage upon which they had strutted their little parts was before me, and my own imagination, coupled with what little I had learned by my reading, was sufficient to bring the days of the Old Testament back to life. The Bible was at last alive to me, I was getting a grip upon it, commencing to believe in it as a real chronicle, becoming personally acquainted with its people.

Fra Elias talked away, giving me the details of the view, and I turned from one to the other, recognizing how aptly the historical narrative of the Bible fitted into it all, when there was a sudden shouting in the dip below the peak upon which the monastery stands. We stood up and looked in that direction; in a few minutes some very tired and blown British soldiers and police came toiling up the steep path to the monastery door. A man in civilian clothes, tweed shooting-jacket, breeches and khaki shirt, was holding two dogs. He, with a couple of uniformed officers, came up to us as we stepped to the door.

“Good evening, Father,” said one officer, who had a couple of metal stars on the shoulder-straps of his tunic; “we’re sorry to bother you, but I wonder if you could let us have some hot water to make tea? The men are pretty nearly all in, but with some hot tea, and a rest, they will get their second wind.”

Fra Elias promised to do what he could, and spoke to the Brother-Cook, telling him to fetch milk, butter,

bread, eggs, and everything else he might have handy, and to spread a meal for the men in the conventual refectory.

"We shan't bother you, Father," said the Englishman in charge of the dogs. "I know how hard it is for you to get provisions up here. We've everything we need in our haversacks. If the Brother will let us take them into his kitchen we can spare your larder. Hot water is all we need."

A sergeant collected the men's rations and disappeared with them, whilst the soldiers and British police, with whom were three or four native constables, settled themselves down gratefully on the flat rocks and turf, loosening their equipment, but laying their rifles very carefully close at hand so that they could grab them at a second's notice—War had stepped into any peace and shattered the calm of Carmel.

The two officers came into the parlour of the monastery, where Fra Elias, in the manner of Ivanhoe's Hermit, produced three bottles of chilled Pilsener beer from some recess of the larder. Bottles that the Carmelites themselves do not use, but which are kept for the emergencies of hospitality. The eyes of the tired men shone, the lieutenant, with a broad grin, thanked the monk and begged him to countermand the order for tea.

"You look very tired, gentlemen," said Fra Elias. "We have several bedrooms. We could arrange quarters for you and your men. Will you not stay the night?"

"Sorry, Father," said the police officer. "I wish we could, but we've got to push on. The trail's hot,



and with a bit of luck we'll come to the end of it up here on Carmel."

"What has happened?" the monk asked in his careful English. "Nothing terrible, I trust?"

"Bad enough," snapped the policeman, grimly. "An English officer shot dead near Athlit, and a couple of Englishwomen badly wounded. We got there twenty minutes after the shooting occurred, and my dogs picked up a fresh scent at once. We've been following it now for seven hours, and as soon as we're rested a bit we must push on. I only hope that the murdering devils belong to some village up here and have not doubled all the way round just to throw us off the trail. There's no help for it, though, we've got to follow their trail whichever way they went."

"How terrible," said the monk, aghast. "The officer, you say, is dead? And the ladies, are they in any danger?"

"Yes, he's dead," they answered. "His wife is only slightly wounded, but the other lady has had several bullet-wounds. I don't know if there is any hope for her, but she looked pretty bad when I saw her being put into the ambulance."

Fra Elias's lips moved silently as he prayed quickly for the repose of the soul of the man snatched from life, and for the recovery of the injured women.

"Truly, with every passing day, Palestine seems to go from bad to worse," he said, sadly. "Who can tell what the end may be? But this hunting of men with dogs seems to me to be the most terrible thing of which I have ever heard."

"Well, that's as may be, Father," retorted the

officer, shortly. "For my part I can see nothing but good in it. The Arabs are becoming very much afraid of my dogs, and if they serve to make them too scared to commit murders they will have done their job. If we can save human life by employing dogs to bring criminals to justice, I can't see any objection to using them."

"It has naught to do with me," replied Fra Elias, "and I admit that there is much in what you say. But I cannot but feel sorry for the men whom you hunt, and even sorrier for you, the hunters."

"For us, Father?" asked the younger of the two army officers in amazement. "Why on earth should you be sorry for us?"

"Because, sir," replied the monk, "I can think of nothing which could more rapidly brutalize a man than this terrible hunting of a fellow man with a pack of dogs. That is why I am sorry for you. I know that it is your duty, that it must be done, but my heart bleeds for the degradation you gentlemen have to undergo by being employed in this awful chase."

They were quite incapable of understanding him—I didn't myself; if human rats must be hunted down then, the hunters are surely doing a service to humanity—but, now that I am back in Dorset again, I'm not quite so sure that the good Father was merely a sentimental idealist.

"Do you get good results with your dogs?" I asked the police officer, doing my best to deflect their attention to me, before they said something to show their resentment at the monk's words.

"Yes," he replied, "on the whole we are fairly

successful. Recently a very famous man, Starkey the archæologist who unearthed Lachish, was murdered by an armed gang. The dogs led us straight to the house of one of the killers, and the criminal confessed his guilt before he was executed."

"You've got a pretty dangerous job, haven't you?" I asked. "I don't mean only at the end of your hunts when you've got the vermin bottled up, but from murder attempts when you're off duty."

"They certainly don't like us," he answered with a grin. "These 'wogs' would very much like to see me planted in Bishop Gobat's cemetery on Mount Zion."

I asked him who on earth, or what on earth, were "wogs", and made the discovery that this is the generic term used by British Police and military for all non-Jewish Palestinians—Jews were simply "Yids", or "Ikey-Mo's", generally the former, though they were also referred to as "Four-by-Two's". I went on to inquire if any attempts were made to poison the dogs, and was told that they were too strictly guarded for that.

My interest in this man-hunt was at fever-heat, and I asked if I might come along with them to see the end. They were rather doubtful, not because they did not want me, but for the reason that, if they ran into trouble and there was some shooting, I might get killed, and then they'd have an embarrassing job explaining why an English civilian was with them. They tried to put me off by saying that they might be out for a good many hours, and that the going was fairly bad, but I won their reluctant consent in the end.

Fra Elias sadly wished me good-bye. I believe that the good man was very disappointed in me; he saw only morbid curiosity in my desire; the others were forced to this, to him, distasteful duty, but I was going on my own initiative, and the good monk evidently thought the worse of me for succumbing to my morbid inquisitiveness. However, when the party buckled on its equipment, I went with them.

The summit of Carmel is a wild and rocky place, but it is very fertile where the peasants have cleared away the rocks and uprooted the stunted trees and thorn-crub. It is not unlike some parts of Dorset, the wild country between Hook and Maiden Newton close to my own home, for there are fields, trees, hedges and dry-stone walls. Every now and again we came across men working in the little, stone-strewn fields, or tending sheep and goats.

The dogs never faltered. On we went at a brisk walk—the soldiers and police striding along, most of them carrying their rifles across their fore-arms, or tucked under their arm-pits as though we were walking up partridges in a field of roots at home. I am not going to deny that there was the very dickens of a thrill in it all—at any moment we might come under fire—there was certainly plenty of cover for the Arab murderers to employ for an ambush. There was twice the excitement of riding with the Cattistock Hunt over Sturt Hill in Dorsetshire, for our chase was Man, and the best fox in the world cannot come up to the human quarry in sheer brutal zest.

I am ashamed to write that, but I am trying to give the stark facts, and, at the time, I must have reverted

to primeval sadism; it is horrible, degrading now, when I come to think of it all in cold blood, yet, at that time, it sent the blood tingling and racing through my every nerve and vein.

The police officer in charge of the dogs was an expert at his craft—more, he was an idealist, if one can use that word—at least he was a fanatic, a zealot, quite as determined as Elijah. He saw himself as the avenger of blood; maybe he was right. From the descriptions I heard, the ambush had been a very nasty affair indeed. The dead officer and the two English ladies had been shot down in the most ruthless and cold-blooded manner. If we really discovered the criminals no punishment could be severe enough for them.

As an ordinary plain Englishman my blood was afire for vengeance. The herd instinct, perhaps. Someone had injured members of my own herd; the murderers were coloured men, and therefore had added sheer impertinence to their callous killing. To be perfectly honest, their impudence in daring to strike at one of the sacrosanct whites was worse, in our estimation, than the fact of murder. Of course not one of us, officers, soldiers, nor myself, admitted or, perhaps, fully realized that point. We believed ourselves charged with extremely righteous indignation—so did some of the people who burned Joan of Arc.

On we went—and on. Every thicket, each outcrop of rock was keenly examined by shrewd and practised eyes for signs of an ambush, for the slightest indications that the quarry had turned at bay. We crossed little ravines, we tramped past caverns cut in the

ocks, many of them with the Sign of the Cross deeply carved by ancient hermits above their entrances, for we were in an area which had seen many an anchorite's leisure-pain of intoxicating, luxuriant self-pity in the ages of Faith.

Once or twice we met wayfarers, mainly Druze farmers, who, so a policeman told me, were returning from their fields down below on Armageddon, or in the pass between Harosheth-of-the-Gentiles and the Hill of the Priests. They were not dealt with gently when they stoutly denied having seen any sign of fugitives, but there was no time to be lost in questioning them too closely—and on we went behind the training dogs.

The police officer in charge of them continually took my eye. In his stocky figure I saw Relentless and Vengeful Justice incarnate. I hated the murderers for what they had done, and yet, I could not help feeling a stab of pity for them, their doom seemed so certain. They might elect to stand and fight; they might even kill some of this posse of avengers, but their doom appeared inevitable, for they had only one alternative to dying beneath our bullets—the noose in the Castle at Acre.

Mile after mile—down into dells, up over knolls, across the reddish-brown heavy clay of the fields, rampling down scarlet anemones, brushing aside tall collyhocks; the white clouds scurrying a few hundred feet overhead, a fresh breeze sighing off the Mediterranean, whose blue breast we saw occasionally down some chine, or from the crest of rocky ridges. On and on we tramped swiftly, behind the straining,

lolling-tongued Death-dogs, lusting along their Man-scent.

At long last there was a halt, and the weary, foot-sore, grim-faced men bunched suddenly together. In one group, which I joined, stood the police officer talking to the two military men. A few yards away the soldiers stood together, carefully posted by a sergeant in case a volley might come shrieking from cover. Apart, and feeling infinitely superior in social status to the common soldiers, were the police. The dogs—and for the first time in my life I began to hate dogs—stood with slavering tongues eager to be sniffing along that deadly trail of blood, impatient of the master who had checked them. Call me a sentimental idiot if you like—the Arab murderers certainly deserved no sympathy—but, hang it all, they were *men*, and these were brute hounds with which we were hunting them. Hounding them; the phrase took on a new and very sinister meaning. I would have left the hunt if I had been able, but I couldn't, my morbid human instincts compelled me to stay. Pride and shame, attraction and revulsion inextricably entangled.

The police officer spoke.

"We are close to the village of Ijzim," he said. "I thought that the trail would lead somewhere near to Haifa, though I expected that we should be taken to Tireh down on the plain. You know the orders, don't you? Surround the place, challenge anyone attempting to leave, and shoot to kill if they refuse to halt. I'll need an escort to enter the houses to which we are led. Now let's get started, the sooner this is over the better." He turned to me. "You'd better stay outside

the village in the cordon, for you never know what these brutes will do when they are cornered."

The military officers issued their instructions to their men, and I saw a new freshness come into the weary faces. I felt that way myself. We were at the end of the hunt—the foxes had gone to ground just ahead—rattle excitement crisped the air.

A few hundred yards farther on we came into sight of the little village, a poverty-stricken place of small stone houses. We must have taken the villagers completely by surprise, for we were quite close, and had a small section of soldiers working round to the far side, before any alarm was raised.

A few Arabs ran into houses. With mad eagerness our men pressed on, their rifles ready, fingers on their triggers.

Suddenly an Arab came running from the cover of the houses, racing, with head up and legs going like pistons, as he made a frantic dash for the shelter of the scrub-covered hillside. A dozen British voices, aided by some of the Arab police, yelled and shouted at him to halt, but he took no notice except to put on a further spurt, and to drive his body forward with doubled speed and stress of energy.

Two or three rifles crashed, one so close behind me that I thought my ear-drums were split. The fugitive seemed to leap a yard high, then he stumbled, recovered his feet, and started to run again—another rifle shot. The poor devil bounded upright, his head snapped back as his spine curved, and down he went in a smashing tumble. For a moment or two his heels beat a mad tattoo on the rocky earth until, with a



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The military officers issued their instructions to their men, and I saw a new freshness come into the weary faces. I felt that way myself. We were at the end of the hunt—the foxes had gone to ground just ahead—little excitement crisped the air.

A few hundred yards farther on we came into sight of the little village, a poverty-stricken place of small one houses. We must have taken the villagers completely by surprise, for we were quite close, and had a small section of soldiers working round to the far side, before any alarm was raised.

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convulsive jerk, he grew still. I had seen a man killed by intentional violence—all the excitement and mad exaltation ran out of me like water out of a cracked firkin, leaving me deathly sick for pity of it all.

We ran forward to the limp, prostrate figure. A police constable turned him over—he was quite dead—and searched amongst his clothes. The man looked very disappointed as he ended his search.

“The —— hasn’t got a gun, sir,” he growled. “Not even a —— dagger. ‘Ullo, wot’s this?” He groped about for a second, and then with the utmost satisfaction produced two empty brass cartridge-cases. “‘Ere y’are, sir,” he went on in triumph, “hexpended cartridges. ‘E must be one of the bastards wot shot the officer and the two wimmen.”

My God! That was supposed to be evidence. Arabs will always pick up empty cartridge-cases for the value of the brass, which their village smiths will make up into ornaments or use to cover their dagger-sheaths—or refill them on their home-made cartridge-presses. The dead man might have been one of the murderers—that can never be proved or disproved now, but, seeing that he had no weapon whatsoever, naught but these two empty cases, there seemed to be little enough evidence. True, he had run away, but that was proof of nothing but an uneasy conscience. He may have been guilty of some other offence, and ran because he thought the patrol had come for him. Or he might really have been one of the murdering gang. In any case, he has suffered the fate of the guilty. He is dead—and therefore far wiser than any of us who saw him shot down like a bolting rabbit.

And yet I must say that I admired the cool, deliberate courage of those men of the Palestine Police. The officer in charge of the dogs went into that village, knowing that any moment might be his last, that at any second he might be blasted apart by gunfire. He believed that he was on the trail of the desperadoes, men who would kill and kill before being themselves killed, and yet he went forward with the utmost matter-of-factness and quietest bravery.

There is not much more to tell. The murderers' trail led to two houses; they were not in residence. A message was sent into Haifa. More troops and police arrived, and the village of Ijzim was "put to the question," in the strictest sense. Later, a party of Royal Engineers made their appearance, and two houses, those to which the dogs had led the patrol, went soaring and rocketing into the clear air, torn apart by the thundering blast of the explosion detonated by the Sappers.

I had read of a Roman Peace—of making a desolation and calling it peace; I now saw what it meant. I am not saying that Ijzim men had not taken part in the ambush on the car, most probably some of them had done so, but that seemed a very poor excuse for ruthlessly destroying two homes, for sending women and little children into destitution. Still less for what followed, the collective fining of everyone in the village; and, because the poor devils could not pay, for seizing their small, pitiful flocks and herds and driving them away to be sold.

I may be too imaginative, but I rather put myself in the places of these poor villagers, probably because

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I had read of a Roman Peace—of making a desolation and calling it peace; I now saw what it meant. I am not saying that Ijzim men had not taken part in the ambush on the car, most probably some of them had done so, but that seemed a very poor excuse for ruthlessly destroying two homes, for sending women and little children into destitution. Still less for what followed, the collective fining of everyone in the village; and, because the poor devils could not pay, for seizing their small, pitiful flocks and herds and driving them away to be sold.

I may be too imaginative, but I rather put myself in the places of these poor villagers, probably because

they are just farmers like myself. Let us suppose that we had an Asiatic army-of-occupation in Dorset, and that they were there to foist negro colonizers on us to farm our downlands on terms that were more favourable than any which we could obtain. Let us imagine that some of our youngsters objected; that, in sheer desperation, they turned out and shot some of the Asiatics; that they were then hunted by dogs; that yellow-faced, slit-eyed foreigners surrounded, say, Cerne Abbas in Dorset, shot one of the leading farmer's sons because he failed to halt; and, finally, suppose that two of our farmhouses were blown up by the foreign Engineers, and all our stock was seized. Try to imagine what we should feel, and then make some attempt to understand what the Arabs think of us. The analogy is complete. Because we had been driven desperate, deliberately driven desperate, we turned on our tyrants in our despair—to be mercilessly punished for what we had been driven to do and then left to starve in our destitution because our means of livelihood was snatched away.

I asked a senior police officer what good this sort of thing could do. He was perfectly sincere in his answer.

"Arabs only understand brute force," he replied. "We've tried being decent to 'em, and they took our goodness for weakness, now they are being taught a lesson."

"But what on earth are these poor farming folk to do now?" I asked. "You've seized their stock and blown up their houses; what about their women and kiddies?"

"They'll just have to lump it," he answered. "If they realize that murdering white folks is going to bring punishment on them they'll mighty soon pack it up."

"But there's no proof that these people had anything to do with that ambush of yesterday," I persisted.

He looked amazed. "Good Lord, man," he objected, "didn't the dogs lead us here?"

"But, hang it, that's not evidence," I objected. "At best it is only proof that the murderers passed this way. It doesn't prove that they came from this place. Your people and the soldiers have turned the village upside down, but you haven't found anything to connect Ijzim with the murder."

"Of course we have," he said, stubbornness in his voice; "didn't the trail lead here?"

"Then if it had led to your own front door because the criminals may have come to your house, you would have been guilty of the murder of the British officer, I suppose?" I asked, sarcastically.

He was looking at me with narrowed eyes. "Looks to me as though you were on the side of these wogs," he said, suspiciously.

"Not by any means," I protested. "I'm all for punishing crime and also for upholding British authority for so long as is needful, but I'm hanged if I can see that this is any way in which to do it. If there was any proof against these people then I would say nothing. What on earth is the use of pauperizing these farming folk? You're just forcing them to take to the hills to rob and slay, not only because they hate



Britain for what she has done to them, but to make some money to feed their families. We're only making worse enemies for ourselves by this sort of thing."

He shrugged his shoulders, and answered coldly:

"We've tried everything to pacify them, but we can't do anything with them now that some European countries have taken a hand in encouraging them. The only thing is to scare them, to frighten the living daylights out of them. Come over here, and look at this."

He led me to a large house in the centre of the village.

"This is what they call the Guest-house," he told me, "what you would call the Parish Hall at home. See this wireless receiver? Have a good look at it. It was given to this village free by the agents of a European country, and they keep up a good supply of free batteries. See anything peculiar about it?"

I did. It was locked so that its tuning-dial could not be altered. It could receive messages only on one wave-length. I looked up.

"That's right," said the officer, "it can only receive one programme. If you spoke Arabic you'd realize what a flood of anti-British propaganda comes over that wave-length every twenty-four hours. Why, these Arabs firmly believe that the Empire is finished, and they are regaled with a hash-up of news that sends them mad. That's the cause of most of our troubles. If only we had a way of smashing up every wireless-receiver in Palestine, we would have some chance of carrying out our job."

There was another set beside the first one, dusty and

neglected looking. I asked what it was. He looked scornful.

"Oh," he said, "that! Why, that is the set provided by the Government, the key is held by the village headman, but the brutes prefer Bari, they simply won't listen in to the stuff our own broadcasting company puts out, if they can help it."

I went back to my quarters in the Stella Maris Hospice on Carmel, very sick at heart. If this is what is meant by British rule in the Holy Land then I am very sorry that I have seen it. Like most ordinary folk at home I believed in the civilizing and benevolent rôle of our Empire as colonizers—fruit, I suppose, of that intensive propaganda to which we are exposed as youngsters at school, and daily, by the newspapers at home.

There was worse the next day. Haifa, native Haifa that is, was in mourning—two more Arabs had been hanged on the great gallows at Acre by order of Courts-martial. Three more had just been sentenced to death. The amazing speed of these cases took your breath away. Arrest, trial, sentence and execution could all happen within a week—not much time for second thoughts or for mercy. Once again my analogy of the Asiatic army-of-occupation, negro settlers and yellow-skinned terror in my own Dorsetshire, came to my mind, and I was glad to hear Edgar tell me that he had arranged with the good Franciscan Friars for my accommodation at some of their Hospices throughout Palestine.

I took a seat in a native-driven taxi and left Haifa to go to Acre across the Bay, where I thought I would

spend a day before I went on by way of the road through the mountains to Safed, and thence down to the Sea of Galilee, from which place I would make my way to near-by Nazareth, and so to Jerusalem in the south.

## CHAPTER SIX

THE city of St. John of Acre from the motor-track along the crescent of golden beach from Haifa, looks like an ogre's castle in fairy-land. The yellow curtain-walls jut from the sea, and over the crenels of the battlements a confused jumble of roofs, towers, minarets and steeples thrust their battered, blinded faces. Except in size, for to-day it is far smaller than once it was, you get much the same view of Acre that Richard Lion-heart and his dear little lady, Berengaria of Navarre, had seven hundred and fifty years ago.

We splashed across the Kishon's outfall, with our wheels in about six inches of water, and thence we sped along the sloping beach, our left-side wheels not three feet from the Mediterranean ripples; low sand-dunes lay on our right, until we crossed a concrete bridge over another river, the Belus, and struck a metalled road once again. After passing beside a palm-grove we rolled through a grim gate with a double-right-angle turn beneath its gloomy vaulting, commanded by loopholes and arrow-slits, into a shady street in the city's market.

Arabs were sitting about on little, low, rush-bottomed stools, clad in flowing garments, gravely sucking the long tubes of gurgling water-pipes, or sipping tiny bowls of coffee, and talking quietly amongst

themselves as they watched the busy stream of passers-by. I caught the glint of quickly averted eyes as I passed, and saw a smouldering hatred in most of them.

A little Arab boy came up as I stood there on the pavement, in front of a high, covered street, inside which coppersmiths were beating with their hammers upon their handiwork. He said something in Arabic. Then he asked me, in weird English:

"You wanting the Match Factory?"

"No," I replied, smiling.

"You wanting see the manager?"

"No. I want to go to the Franciscan monastery," I answered.

For the first time I saw a hint of friendliness in his bright eyes.

"You not Jew?" he queried suspiciously.

"I am not," I answered.

"You not English!" he declared with deep conviction in his tones. "No Englishman damn fool enough come stand here in Acre on hanging-morning without gun and soldiers. You must be American. Eh?"

So there was another execution of an Arab leader taking place. No wonder that the men on the little stools were looking at me with such menace and hatred. Yes, it seemed safer to be an American. I nodded my head.

The boy shouted something. Instantly the glowering faces broke into smiles, a couple of young men in European suits but wearing scarlet fezes came up and shook hands warmly with me. In perfect English they asked me if there was anything they could do. When I said that I wanted to go to the Franciscan Friary

where I was expected as a guest, they seemed astonished at my lack of American accent. One of them, however, settled the point.

"You must be from Boston, sir," he suggested, "for you speak like a Boston man, with no trace of the American accent."

I had learned something fresh. I checked it afterwards and found that the young Arab was correct. Boston folk of any education speak better English than the English. All that I could remember about Boston was some jingle I had once heard, about a couple of its leading families—"The Lovells speak only to the What's-their-names, but the What's-their-names speak only to God." In an atmosphere of the most cordial goodwill I was led down through a maze of cobbled streets, lined with tiny shops, until my self-appointed guides delivered me at a big gate, and announced that I was at the Franciscan Friary.

It was not quite ten o'clock when I arrived in Acre, and as lunch would not be served until nearly one I had some time to look around the city. The Father Guardian recommended an old Christian, who had been doorkeeper in the British Consulate at Jerusalem before the War, and with him, and my Meistermann's Guide, I started out to see Acre's sights and sites. My intention was to fix the principal places in my mind and then to revisit them later by myself.

Acre does not figure very largely in the Bible, so that I had no Biblical allusions with which to bother myself. It was ever a city of Phoenicia; Joshua and his tribes never entered it. It comes time and again into the history of the Maccabees, as well as in the tale of

Herodian times; Cleopatra and St. Paul, a strange couple to put together, but very much alike in certain aspects of their characters—the will and the sheer driving urge of accomplishment in both of them—were once here. The Jews made a wonderful gesture of heroic civil disobedience and non-co-operation against Petronius the Roman Governor, in this town.

My main interest lay in the fact that this is the place where our English flag has been four times hoisted: in the Crusade, when English kings and princes like Lion-heart, Richard of Cornwall and Edward Long-shanks were out here in command of national armies; secondly, when we helped the Turkish governor, Jezzar Pasha to withstand Napoleon in 1799; again, for the third time, when on 4th November, 1840, a combined British, Austrian and Turkish fleet bombarded the city, and drove out the Egyptians who had taken it nearly ten years before from the Turks. The fourth hoisting of the broad Red Cross of St. George is the present occasion—though it looks as though it will soon be hauled down and the Zionist bi-colour be run up in its place. That is not a matter which concerns me in the least—the Zionists can scarce do worse than a government which shoots men for running, and sends native homes hurtling to the skies with the blast of explosives, not to mention those ghastly hangings here in Acre, and also in Jerusalem.

I found that it was very easy to take sides in Palestine. One can rapidly become a fervent pro-Zionist, or, more easily, an intolerant lover of all things Arab. I wonder why one feels impelled towards the Arab side? After all, the Jews own as good a case as they

have. Two things cause this, first, probably, our natural sympathy for the weaker party, especially when that weaker party is being subjected to all the rigours of ruthless military rule; secondly, though I hate to say it, because we don't quite like the Jews as a race. They're queer, so we dimly think. Sort of sinister, slinking figures with a grudge against the whole world. You know the sort of thing I mean. I heard some half-baked agitator at work one market-day in Bridport's South Street spouting about hanging the half-dozen most prominent Jews in every country, and so bringing international war and hatreds to a close.

If only it was true, with what joy would I swing upon the other end of the halter to hoist the sinister figures to the peak. Jews or anyone else; if, by sacrificing a few, we could save the many. But it is so horribly untrue; if we dislike Jews it is because of what we have forced them to be; because of our guilty consciences; because of the lies and calumnies circulated throughout nearly twenty-five centuries. Even if Jews were all that the semi-educated believe them to be—ever anxious to stab their Christian fellow citizens in the back—it would be nothing surprising. It is a standing miracle that Jews are such good and loyal citizens, if one will only remember the two thousand years of tyranny which they have suffered. Read Dean Milman and see what was done to them in our own country in Plantagenet days—aye, and since.

I made up my mind, there in Acre, not to take sides, for that would only make me see, and hear, the



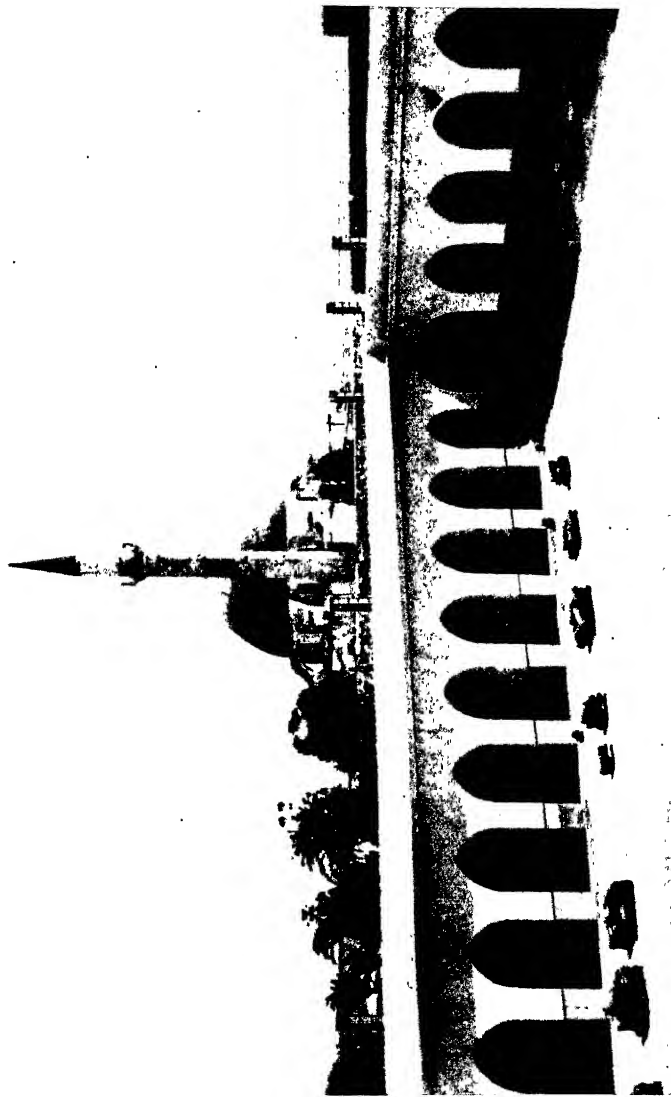
things which came nearest to my own prejudices.

With my guide I wandered all over Acre. It is surrounded by a fairly modern wall, pierced and loop-holed for musketry and canon, of which there are still many on the ramparts. Like black plums in a pudding, some of the cannon-balls of the British Navy of 1840 stick into the seaward walls; there are several in the curtain-walls of the Hospitaller Castle, which is now used as the Central prison.

Edgar's letter won me admission to the Castle. I was very anxious to see it, not as a prison, but for its other interest, for there has been a fortress on this spot for close on five thousand years. The present structure is mainly Crusading, on Roman foundations, though the upper part is the restoration work of the Turkish governor who resisted Napoleon. I suppose that most of us would be glad to be shown a prison, for there is a deal of morbid curiosity in nearly all of us.

I was shown Acre prison in its entirety, and I don't want to say much about it. I came out feeling spiritually filthy. You cross a narrow bridge over the dry moat, and are admitted through a little door in the curtain-wall. Inside, there is a guard-room on your right, where, probably, Hospitaller knights and serjeants-at-arms once kept their watch. You pass through a short lobby and find yourself in the open air again; a concrete wall, topped with barbed-wire in front of you; steel gates leading through a maze of barbed-wire in the opening.

To the left was an archway closed with another steel grille, behind it convicts at work. To the right a flight of stone stairs ran up to rooms above. Another



INSIDE THE HOSPITALLER CASTLE, NOW PALESTINE'S PENAL CENTRE, AT ACRE

The Great Mosque in centre background



vaulted arch closed the view in that direction. I was taken through the gate in the concrete wall, and found myself in an open courtyard. On two sides, the east and south, there was a cloistered walk, with steel-barred doors and windows showing in the arcades. To the right was a wall pierced with the doors of lavatories, kitchens, stores and wash-houses. Behind was the concrete wall.

I was taken round the cells, large rooms in which anything from a dozen to thirty men were accommodated in comfort, by which word I mean merely so far as air-space was concerned, for of creature comforts there were none. Each man had a coconut-matting sleeping-rug, and a pile of dark army blankets—apart from the neatly rolled bundles of bedding there was nothing in the cells, for the convicts sleep on the polished cement floor. No hardship to an Arab, I suppose, who had been used to such a bed since birth.

A corridor ran round the rear walls of the cells on three sides of the courtyard, communicating with the work-shops and store-rooms, as well as with the more sinister punishment cells and the criminal lunatic quarters. These last were exactly like the monkey-cages in the zoo, and their inhabitants were dreadful. The workshops, on the other hand, were excellent, and I saw some carpenters hard at work, turning out beautiful furniture, with nothing but a London furnishing firm's catalogue to guide them.

Another gang was turning out very good reproductions of Persian carpets, working on a primitive loom, and using the wool unravelled from regulation grey socks which had been cast as unserviceable. The dyes

were made by the convicts themselves from earths and plants of which they knew.

I was glad to get away, especially after my tour was ended by my being shown the execution chamber, and the gallows on which so many men have died. One piece of probably unwitting savagery jarred upon me. The condemned cells are cages in the vestibule to the execution-chamber. There are two of them, and if, as often happens, there is more than one execution to be carried out on a certain morning, the second or subsequent victim, must suffer the agonies of the damned—for he can see his comrade in evil fortune taken out, hear all that takes place on the farther side of the black door—and then die himself a hundred times before the bolts of his cage are shot back, and it is his turn to suffer.

The British Inspector who took me round told me that there had been as many as three executions on one morning, one of them being the time when three men were hanged for their parts in the 1929 rebellion. "It's not fair," he said. "In an English prison the governor and deputy-governor have a far easier time than Jock and I have here with these continued executions."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"In England," he replied, "it is bad enough. Like us, a prison governor there gets to know the man who is going to be hanged. You see him every day. You know his motives and his own feelings—often a murderer is not nearly so bad a criminal as a professional thief or blackmailer, let alone a dope-dealer or a white-slaver. He's often some poor devil who has killed in

a sudden fit of overmastering passion, jealousy or rage—I often feel like saying ‘there but for the grace of Allah goes little me.’

“As I say, you get to know the man, his relatives, and his own worries and family-troubles, and then you’ve got to kill him with your own hands, for we British officers have to act as executioners, not just stand by and watch like our opposite numbers do in England. It’s a rotten job, believe me. I’m pretty tough, but I’d give anything to be really sick on an execution morning, so that I could beg off the spectacle.”

“Surely you don’t get much chance to weep over the troubles of the fellows who are tried by the Military Courts?” I said.

His face set grimly. “No, and there’d be no tears in any case for that bunch of crooks. I want no excuse to miss their hangings, believe me.”

“But why?” I asked. “Aren’t they quite sincere in believing that they are fighting for their rights?”

The burly Inspector snorted. “Don’t make me sick,” he grunted. “They’re just a gang of toughs looting and killing for what they can make out of it. They’re not patriots, they’re criminals.”

“I suppose that you served in the Royal Irish Constabulary, didn’t you?” I asked. “Most of the officers of the Palestine Police seem to have done so.”

“I did,” he said, “and it was a far better and safer job than this one.”

“Some of the men who were hanged during the Troubles of 1919, ’20 and ’21, were also condemned as criminals,” I said gently. “Kevin Barry and the rest.”

"That was different, they were white men," the Inspector snorted.

"You mean that they are heroes nowadays, noble patriots, held as martyrs by their fellows, because they were white men—and, conversely, that the Arabs, whom you are hanging, are ruffianly murderers because their skins are brown?" I inquired.

"Go to Hell!" he said, and turned upon his heel.

I passed out of Hell, instead, by recrossing the narrow bridge, and, as I emerged on to the rampart walk, felt a dirty, greasy cloud lifting off my spirit.

Acre is a vast dust-heap. It is dying, soon it will be nothing but deserted ruins. Its trade has gone with the growth of the great new port of Haifa across the Bay. Thirty years ago Haifa was an insignificant village, whilst Acre was a city of importance—now all that is changed. The ramparts and curtain-walls are tumbling down, blocks of masonry and collapsed houses are everywhere. The sea-breaches are not repaired, and they grow larger with every storm of winter.

One hallowed sanctuary of utter peace I found; it was beneath that Hell on earth, the prison. The chapel of the Hospitallers lies beneath the prison courtyard, it is approached from a narrow street, close to the memorial erected to the officers of the Royal Marines who died in the operations of 1799 and 1841.

There is not much to see—the ancient House of God has been filled with earth, so that it might take the weight of the new fortifications above. When you enter you stand at the spring of the vaulting of its

ceiling, perhaps thirty feet above the old floor. Dingy stonework, earth-stained and festooned with the most gigantic cobwebs I have ever seen, stretch around you, yet—desecrated, dirty, almost gone, there is an atmosphere about this holy place such as I have felt in few others. I recalled the heroic tale of the nuns of Acre. It is worth the telling:

When the Moslems captured the city from the Crusaders in 1291, some of the nuns, more afraid of the violation of their chastity than of death, mutilated themselves, cutting off noses and ears, gashing their cheeks, in the hope of making themselves so revolting to the conquerors that they would be slain out of hand, and escape the searing horrors of rape. They mustered in this ancient chapel, and here they died beneath sword and axe, wielded by angry foes, maddened by being cheated of a soldierly perquisite.

Whilst we are on this period it is just as well to remember that the Crusaders were no better than ourselves. Very few of them were the high-souled idealists we picture—the majority were land-hungry, selfish, proud, superstitious ruffians only too willing to sacrifice their souls for their own advantage. A great many were criminals who had made their own countries too hot to hold them. A few, especially the men of the First Crusade, may have been impelled by the highest motives—most of the members of the later expeditions certainly were not. The descendants of the original army were only too anxious to prevent any fresh arrivals from gaining a stake in the country, so that they were more or less allies of the Saracens when matters came to a head.



As I have said, it is the Crusading interest of Acre which holds you more than anything else, and I walked out that evening to St. George's Mount, a long, low mound to the eastward of the gardens outside the walls. It was here that Richard Lion-heart's standard was torn down by the agents of Leopold, Archduke of Austria—you may recall the incident which was dinned into all of us at school. You may remember it better from Scott's *The Talisman*, which I expect you had to "do" as part of English literature.

Napoleon had his guns mounted on St. George's Mount, and a hundred battles and skirmishes have taken place on and around it. In every siege of Acre it has been the besieging commander's station. I looked up my book, and sat aghast at the tale of bloodshed which belongs to this old city. Hundreds of thousands of lives have been poured out here—and what on earth has been the use?

Here is the list:

1. The Israelites at the time of their invasion assailed it, but were repulsed, mainly because they had no fleet to make an effective blockade.
2. Captured by Sennacherib of Assyria.
3. Captured by Artaxerxes II. I had never heard of him, but the guide-book says so.
4. Alexander the Great took the city.
5. Ptolemy Soter, one of his generals, captured it on the conqueror's death.
6. Antiochus the Great captured it by treachery.
7. Jonathan Maccabeus slain in it.

8. Simon Maccabeus attempted its capture.
9. Alexander Bala took it. Another man of whom I had never heard.
10. Cleopatra's son took it.
11. Surrendered to Pacoras, King of Parthia.
12. Fell to the Moslems in A.D. 638.
13. The Crusader king, Baldwin I, took it in 1104.
14. Acre surrendered to Saladin, 1187.
15. Richard Lion-heart took it, 1191.
16. Acre destroyed by earthquake in 1202.
17. The Moslems recaptured it, and totally destroyed it in 1291.
18. The Turkish governor restored it in 1749.
19. Besieged by Napoleon, 1799.
20. Captured by Ibrahim Pasha and his Egyptians.
21. Bombarded by British fleet and recaptured, 1841.
22. City's ramparts rebuilt in 1843.
23. Taken by British in 1918.

It is a horrible tale. And all that there is to show to-day for that holocaust of blood and misery is a heap of mouldering rubbish. Madmen we be still to take part in wars.

I slept that night at the Franciscan Friary, and I sat entranced whilst some of the good Friars told me the story of Acre.

Next morning I took my battered suitcase to the garage close to the gate of the great Mosque, and waited until there was a seat vacant in a car going to Safed. The fare was forty piastres, about eight shillings. An hour later, after my two Arab friends had

done their best for the " American ", I left Acre across a breach hewn through the North Wall.

During that hour I listened to a long tale of woe and misery, but the young men were too bitterly partisan, as in the nature of events they were bound to be, really to carry conviction. I listened politely, but I felt that there was a whole lot to be said for the other two interested parties to the argument, so I kept my mind clear of forming hasty prejudices.

I was glad to be clear of Acre—the hatred, resentment and passionate anger of its people hung over it like a black miasma—Haifa had been bad enough, but the smaller size of Acre made the aura of futile despair more pronounced, as though its essence of futile rage had been distilled and concentrated over those towers of shameful deaths.

We were soon clear of the few houses on the outskirts of Acre, and passing round the side of St. George's Mount, we headed across the plain towards the Mountains of Galilee, three or four miles ahead.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

IT is a beautiful run through the mountains between Acre and the hill-top city of Safed. The valleys are fertile, and in many places are filled with great olive groves and fruit orchards. One outstanding story came to my mind as we sped along; the death of Fulk, Count of Anjou and King of Crusading Jerusalem. Fulk was another of the ties between Palestine and Britain; his son, Geoffrey Plantagenet married the Empress Matilda and became the founder of our own Royal House. His grandsons were Richard Lion-heart and bad King John.

Fulk came to Palestine as the husband of the beautiful Melisande, daughter of King Baldwin the Second of Jerusalem, and, through his marriage, succeeded to the throne of Holy Sepulchre. He was a roistering, bluff, hard-fighting, politic old knight-errant, and met his death on this plain, whilst he was coursing a hare. His horse stumbled, threw its rider, and then rolled on top of him. I could almost see the little drama as I drove across the place where it had happened.

We were a mixed party in the big American saloon—one of the latest Hudsons. I was lucky, for I had been given the seat beside the driver, but in the rear were crammed seven or eight other passengers. There had been five when we left Acre, but, as soon as we were clear of the town's traffic-cops, the driver stopped

and picked up some more, risking a fine for overloading.

Two were hardy, buxom, red-faced country-women with their egg-baskets, on their way home after selling their produce in the market. There was an old Maronite priest in rusty black cassock with a brimless stove-pipe hat on his head; two farmers going home; a young soldier of the Frontier Force, gay in his red sash proceeding on leave—soldiers and policemen always “proceed”, they never move in any other fashion; one was a young man in European clothes on vacation from the American University at Beirut where he was studying medicine; and the other was a shepherd-boy in the employ of one of the farmers.

The student did most of the talking so far as I was concerned. I did not like him—he was neither one thing nor the other—neither Arab nor European—but, mentally, a foul mixture of the two. He seemed to have lost all the charm and native downrightness of his own people, and to have imbibed a queer philosophy all jumbled of Fascism, Communism and a strange perverted Nationalism. He was useful, though, as he was the only one who could speak English.

He told me that the road over which we were speeding, and a very good road it was too, though somewhat narrow, had been built by convict labour. It followed the ancient Roman and Crusader track, but it had been impassable for wheeled vehicles until the Government of Palestine had taken it in hand.

It seemed a fine piece of work to me, for I could see how it must help the local farmers to get the produce of their fertile fields and orchards down to the markets,

but the Student saw nothing in it save the hand of Imperial Militarism. The road had been constructed, he maintained, so that troops and police might be the more easily brought into the hill-country. That was probably true, but even so, it was merely another proof of consideration for decent, law-abiding folks. He snorted with contempt when I pointed this fact out to him. I was beginning to be quite thankful that I had been mistaken for an American, after I heard some of the opinions these people held of the British authorities.

We stopped to discharge passengers at several little villages on the way. I made a note of the names of some of them—Mejdel Krum with its well tilled and fertile wheat fields—Rameh in the midst of gardens and olive-groves—Ferradi with a copious spring and many varieties of market-garden produce. Then we started really serious climbing into the mountains. The views were gorgeous, the finest I saw in all the Holy Land. Miles and miles of mountain country lay below; in the distance lay a large, pear-shaped blue lake, the Sea of Galilee. A snow-covered mountain-peak in the far distance was Hermon, the Crown of the Lebanon. In every little pocket of earth between the grey, weathered slabs of limestone rock, a profusion of flowers danced and glowed in the mountain breeze.

It was a misnomer to call them "wild flowers"—at least in our English sense, though they were "wild" enough, for they had never known the care of anyone save that of the Great Gardener Himself. In size, formation and colour they were equal to the products

of our most carefully tended nurseries. Anemones of every hue from bright scarlet, purple and blue, to white and even yellow; cyclamens; hollyhocks; tall, four and five foot, stocks of lupins, lupins of a glory such as I had never seen in our Dorset cottage gardens; in the marshy places gorgeous blue iris studded the grass; humbler daisies and great shining, golden king-cups; beside the numerous springs and rivulets stood tall oleanders as fine as those which grow in the sheltered combe of Abbotsbury on the Chesil Bank. Truly it was good to be alive on that lovely morning in Palestine.

These mountain-folk, many of whom are Christians of ancient, forgotten, Apostolic Churches, are very industrious and careful farmers. Their fields were a pattern that could not have been excelled; I have seen far worse in my own West Country. Here they had carefully tended every little space of shallow earth, every soil-pocket between the rocks, whilst the fields of alluvial soil in the valley bottoms shone rich and green with the coming crops. What these hard-working folk could do with a land like mine! If they were farming Dorset you would not see our fair county one waste of pasture as it is to-day!

Our Bible has little to say of this beautiful mountain country. It was outside the field of interest of the old scribes, but now that I have seen the whole of Palestine, and the places where the great scenes of History happened, it is to Galilee, and this fine morning in Spring, that my mind returns with the kindest of recollection.

I was more than glad that I was supposed to be an

American before I reached Safed that morning. At Ferradi we dropped the last of our passengers, and I was left alone with the driver as we sped along. We had reached the highest part of the road, on the very crest of the mountain-range, when five or six armed Arabs suddenly appeared out of the rocks and presented their rifles threateningly at us.

I was scared stiff. There were so many hold-ups and murders these days in Palestine that I could see nothing but disaster and death yawning for me. There wasn't much time for thought, however, though I do remember thinking what a fool I had been to come to the Holy Land at all. The driver pulled on his brakes and sat quietly with his hands raised—and I followed suit, though the thumping of my heart seemed to be choking me.

In an instant they were swarming round the car. One brute jammed his rifle-muzzle into my side, and spat something in Arabic. His meaning was clear enough—he wanted me to alight. As this is the usual preliminary to assassination I did so, almost dumb with the scare I was suffering.

The driver was pattering away some terror-stricken explanation, and the only word I could catch was "Americani". That gave me my cue. I dropped one hand and pointing to my chest said: "American. American." Instantly the faces of the brigands changed. They grinned, dropped their rifle muzzles, and, laughing, spoke to the driver. He grinned back, and in we climbed again. There were cheerful shouts of farewell and in a few minutes we were on our way once more. But I sat mighty thoughtful; I had felt the wing-



feathers of the Death Angel—Azrael is the name superstition has given him—brushing my shoulder, and I was mortally afraid of Old Man Skull-and-Crossed-Bones.

The driver knew very little English, but he did his best.

“ You verree luckee, Mister. You Inglizi man you shoot—pouf! You American—no one hurt. If you ride with Yahudi Jew driver you die—me Arab—bad mans no hurt. Comprenez?” He fell silent a moment, and then asked brightly: “ Parlez-vous Français, monsieur?”

I wished that I did, but my French stopped short at the “ Pen of my aunt is on the table of my grandmother’s uncle ” stage, so I shook my head.

We stopped at a little ruined place with a courtyard of modern houses around it—it was called Meirun and marked one of the ancient synagogues where Jewry reconstituted itself after the Fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. There was a police post there, and I told my tale to the British sergeant in charge. He seemed bored, but he grew annoyed when I persisted with my tale.

“ If you are damn fool enough to go gadding about in the Safed Hills at this time of day, you deserve all you get,” he said. “ Good Lord, man, what d’you expect? There are a hundred places by which gangs can cross the Syrian border just north of us, and in this broken country you’d need a couple of Army Corps to control every inch of road. Take my tip, and if you want to go motoring keep away from the north, at least until this new quarter-of-a-million pound



JEWISH HOUSES IN SAFED DESTROYED  
IN RIOTING



barbed-wire fence is built along the whole frontier."

And that was about all the satisfaction I got, though when I used Edgar's name, he became more respectful, and allowed me to finish my journey to Safed in a police lorry that was going there.

I did not stay in Safed very long. There the conditions were even worse than those in Acre. There is a large Jewish community and a large Arab one, and between the two a great gulf is fixed. In the Rebellion of 1929, there had been a massacre of the Jews, and plenty of murders had taken place since. There was a large garrison of British soldiers and police, but the city is so situated that it can be sniped from practically every side. A rifleman may be only a few hundred yards away in a direct line, but it takes the troops an hour or two to reach his position because of the deep valleys and steep mountain-sides, by which time the sniper is miles away.

In Safed a British police officer reaffirmed the Meirun sergeant's opinion of damned nuisances of tourists, but he allowed the car I hired to join a convoy that was going south to Tiberias. There was nothing to keep me in Safed, and I was anxious to be gone. I had written to Tabgha, a Hospice on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and I was expected there.

Amongst the convoy, with its escort of a small armoured-car mounting a machine-gun, and with a couple of lorries of soldiers, I felt quite safe. The run was really delightful. I saw the Lake of Huleh shining amongst its papyrus-fringed marshlands on the left, and in due time we ran out of the mountains and halted for a few minutes at a Jewish colony called

Roshpina, where there was a large detachment of British troops. Then, on again, over some lower hills of black rocks, with the great sheet of the Sea of Galilee lying ahead.

At a point where the road ran close to the northern shore, my car pulled out of the line, and bumped over a short track, to a stone-built, square house standing in the middle of a beautiful garden right on the bank of the lake. This was Tabgha, the site of Bethsaida, and the moment I passed through the garden gate I knew that I was at home.

Tabgha is a Hospice, but it is in quite a different class to the big Pilgrim Hospices to which I grew accustomed during my stay in Palestine. It belongs to an organization called the Lazarist Fathers; they are the male counterpart of those Sisters you can see in the slums of the big cities, the ladies with the huge, white, floppy linen hats—Sisters of Charity they are called. They were founded by the same person, that burning, zealous little figure, the seventeenth-century Frenchman, who, unlike so many in the Calendar, has one of the best titles I know to be called Saint, Vincent de Paul. Try reading an account of his life—it is worth it—it is about as thrilling a story of adventure as any in this world. And if you want to appreciate this little man, go into one of the slums of our big cities and listen to what the womenfolk of these awful holes have to say about his spiritual daughters.

What I like best about them is that these ladies are not bound by life-long vows like most nuns—they “enlist” for only one year at a time, and, at the end

of any period of engagement, they are free to go back to ordinary life.

I cannot say that I am very fond of monks and nuns and monasteries and convents, but then I don't know very much about them. I realize that they do a tremendous amount of good, and that they are very honest, hardworking, sincere and frugal persons; also that everyone has a right to live their lives in whatever way they choose, so long as they harm no one else—but—and here is my objection, though, mind you, I speak as a layman—I can realize what a hell it must be if one of these folks at, say, the age of thirty-five, wishes to leave the cloister.

I know that they are as free as air to walk out if they wish to do so, that no Order would think of retaining a member who had grown dissatisfied. These tales of "escaped" monks and nuns are just so much nonsense—concocted by stunting journalists. There is no need for any dramatic escape—they could leave by the front door if they chose. No one, at least not in Britain, can detain people against their will. That is not what I mean at all. The fact is that they are not free—they are bound by far stronger chains—their vows. Of course they can obtain a dispensation from them, but there are few who will face the mental agony of the process through which they must go, or endure weeks of ostracism and exhortation whilst the dispensation is being obtained.

A dissatisfied thirty-to-forty year old monk or nun, and I do not think that there are very many of them, must be one of the most tragic people on earth. Think of it—put yourself in the place of such a woman.

You are thirty-odd—you entered the convent at, say, seventeen, and were probably at a school there before you decided to take the picturesque habit, and you have been there ever since. If you leave, your relatives will not want you—you are safely out of their considerations; you have been away so long; your future has seemed so certain; no one has had to bother about your livelihood; they have been rather proud that poor Agatha was a nun—and, frankly, they are not likely to welcome you. You know nothing about earning your own living—remember the parable, “To dig I am unable—to beg I am ashamed”? That is their case, and for pity’s sake do not misjudge the poor things. They get over it and settle down to grey and winterish resignation—sometimes to bitter zeal on the pattern of “sour grapes”.

But worse is the haunting misery of cancelled, or, foresworn, vows—they can make misery for life. How much better to be one of the Daughters of St. Vincent de Paul, one of those brave Ladies of the White Bonnet who do so much heroical good amongst the poorest of the poor. If one of them feels that she cannot continue—she can retire with the proud feeling of having served a term of enlistment in the Master’s Army, and with none of the shamefaced dread and degradation of broken vows. Without that bitter and erroneous text anent those who take the plough’s handle and look back being flung at them.

I am no reformer, and I don’t care very much what happens to people who enter a convent. I certainly would not have the impertinence to mix myself up in any plans or organizations which sought to interfere

with them, but, if I was an English Hitler, and I had his sovereign powers, I would decree that all convents should either not accept novices below the age of forty-five, or, if they wished to do so, that their members should have annual vows like those of the Sisters of Charity, with an adequate provision for length of service; a pension, such as the Army or Police receive, to be paid by their convent, computed upon their length of service.

I am off the track again, and a mighty long way from Palestine, but I was spending so much time in monastic houses that I was beginning to think of these good folks who were such hospitable hosts to me. I'll get back to Tabgha.

It is a low, two-storied house, built of the greyish-black basalt cut out of the cliffs behind, low bluffs, not more than thirty feet high. It has a deep balcony overlooking the lake, upstairs screened against the deadly, malarial mosquitoes. The kitchens, the chapel and the Father-Superior's house are outside the main building. The dining-room is small, the bedrooms tiny but very comfortable. The whole atmosphere is Southern German, bluff, warm, clean, hearty and yet full of simple faith.

The house is covered with bougainvillea, draped so heavily that the building looks like a mass of vegetation, with only the windows as openings. The gardens are lovely, with a green lawn in front, bounded by a terrace wall below which is another strip of turf and rocks bordering the waters of the Sea of Galilee.

It had been lovelier, I was told, before the Jewish electricity generating station had been started some



miles below the outfall of the River Jordan—remember that the Lake is naught but an expansion of the Jordan, though it is thirteen miles from north to south, and over eight wide at the north end of its pear-shaped surface. In the later months of the year Galilee is, so I am told, naught but a brown desolation, but when I saw it it could have been called the Earthly Paradise. The mountains sloping steeply down to the blue water on the east and west, looked as though some giant hand had carelessly thrown a vivid carpet of glowing colours to drape them from flat crests to water's edge.

The Gadarene Hills blazed with scarlet and gold on a living foundation of the brightest green. The heights of Galilee were a mass of gold and purple, huge yellow daisies and lupins, with the glints of scarlet and blue where an outpouring of anemones spilled down their slopes. The plain at the northern end of the Lake, the rolling land around Tabgha was a wonder-garden of every kind of brilliant flower, shining through an undertone of tall papyrus reeds and abundant grass. I am not an artist—I only wish that I were—but, if any man could get the true hues of Galilee upon canvas, his picture would be discredited, for no one would believe that such a kaleidoscope of colours and tints could exist.

It is a short walk of a couple of miles along the shore-road from Tabgha to Tel Hum, which once was Capernaum. Tel Hum stands prominently on the bank marked by a large Franciscan guest-house and chapel built on the edge of the ruins. At Tel Hum stands the shattered shell of the ancient synagogue,

the one building remaining in all the world, in which it is quite certain that the Master walked.

After the walk along the track, which runs about fifty feet higher than the water-level, I came to some green-painted iron gates set in a six-foot stone wall. They stood invitingly open, and I passed down a long formal garden sparsely cultivated, until I met another gate, giving entrance to a courtyard in front of the large house.

A smiling Arab woman opened to my knocking, and took me through the courtyard to a farther gate, on the far side of which I found myself on a broad path, lined with ancient objects, such as corn-mills, querns, stone jars, door-sockets and other things which had been recovered by the spades of the archæologists. Then I found myself in a roofless building, faced by three or four standing columns—stone seats round the walls—stone-paved floor—the synagogue which is the cradle of Christianity.

It was here that the Master taught the beginnings of his Code—He was happy here in the sunlit days before priestly intolerance and priestly pride brought Him to a criminal's death of pain and shame.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

I TOOK my seat upon the stone bench against the wall, close to where the Master must have stood when He was giving His views upon the way in which the whole confused riddle of these lives of ours might be answered. I determined for the moment to put aside all thoughts, and doubts, of whether or not He was God, and to think of Him as a man of about my own age.

He must have felt His young manhood running full in his veins on such a morning as this, in the days when these pitiful ruins were a lovely lakeside town of villas and shops. Capernaum was his favourite home and little wonder, for if the lake is still beautiful, it must have been far more so in the days when towns and villas were all round it, beautifying its shores with gardens, copses, and shaded walks.

Here in Capernaum another figure looms close beside His—that of a fat, paunchy, shrewd-eyed pompous little man: Matthew the Civil Servant. Matthew loved Capernaum—he had as much civic pride in it as the Little Man who catches the 8.25 train to town every morning from Surbiton or Ruislip has in his. Matthew must have been very like the Little Man—he had a public office, he enjoyed the vast importance of working for the Government, for Matthew was a clerk in the Inland Revenue. Doubtless he had

something to say on the Ratepayers' Association Committee, when the townsfolk complained of the Roman centurion being just a little too hectoring in insisting that a man should proceed at the double when he said "Go", or break the town record for the fifty-metre sprint when he bellowed "Come".

Yet this pousy little official was able to rise from his office-stool when the Master went by, and, without giving a week's notice, or going down to the cashier's desk to hand over the funds, to follow Him when He beckoned.

I wondered idly what happened to the public money in "the receipt of Custom" when Matthew went so abruptly away. I don't suppose that times have changed very much, there was bound to have been some junior clerk only too anxious to step into Mr. Matthew's shoes. I couldn't help it—but do you remember a weekly series which was broadcast by the radio last winter, concerning the impossible adventures of a little clerk called Mr. Penny? I had a vision of a Biblical Mr. Penny when I tried to imagine St. Matthew. Pity the bewilderment of the office chief when the junior clerk came in and said that Mr. Bar Alpheus, the cashier, had thrown up his job and gone off to follow some wandering Preacher fellow from Nazareth.

I wonder if Matthew was married? Hardly, for he's a discursive fellow, and I expect that he would have mentioned it. Maybe that was why he was ready to follow when he was called. Though, come to think of it, there must have been a marvellous magnetism about the personality of the carpenter's Son to have

been able to draw a self-satisfied and smug Civil Servant straight from his desk to follow a most precarious mode of life.

Here was a thought—I do not mean to be facetious—but try to think how great a personal attraction there was in the Master to have done just this—to get Matthew out of his seat. As I sat there on one of the stone benches where once people had heard the young Rabbi from Nazareth expound the Law, I read several chapters of St. Matthew, especially viii and ix. I read of all the miracles He had performed, and I took little notice. If He was God, the miracles were simple enough—if He was not, then they were either explainable in some other way, or they only existed in the mind of some piously-fraudulent scribe, writing long years afterwards. The only thing that seemed to matter to me at the moment was that He had been here, and that here He had taught the doctrines which, if they were only observed, could yet save this crazy old world of ours from the pit of blood and death towards which it is reeling.

That little incident of the ancient Mr. Penny throwing up his safe job to follow the wandering Preacher crashed straight into my innermost convictions.

Matthew's is not the most ancient of the Gospels, but it is the one that was most widely known in Palestine during the two or three generations following the Tragedy of Calvary. Some time during the ten years before the Fall of Jerusalem, between A.D. 60 and 70, the Civil Servant who had so abruptly thrown up his position, was persuaded to write down all that he remembered of the days when he had tramped behind

the Master, and changed his name from Levi bar Alpheus to Matthew.

Matthew must have been a man of substance—probably he did as his official brethren of those days did—he made a little “on the side.” He must have done so to have been in a position to lay a feast for the Master in his house immediately after he had sacked himself from a very profitable job. It is not mentioned, but I suppose that his estate went into the communal purse, and let us hope that he kept an eye keen enough upon the red-headed Nablus man, Judas of Qoriyot, Iscariot as we know him, to prevent him from embezzling more than his usual percentage. I expect that Matthew did so—though he may have been too much inflamed by his new fervour to have worried about earthly affairs—somehow, I think that the self-sacked excise man would never have lost all traces of prim and hide-bound routine in money matters.

Matthew at the time he wrote his Gospel—his memoirs in other words—was a venerable old gentleman, high in the reverence of the new sect of Hebrew Christians. He was not what we could call a Christian in the modern sense, Matthew was always a Jew of Jews, and he wrote for Jews, especially for the Jews who lived outside the boundaries of the Holy Land. Neither did I believe that word for word, the modern “Gospel according to St. Matthew” is what he wrote, but it is a fairly accurate précis of what the old gentleman had to say, and whether he used Hebrew or Greek, is a matter for scholars and has no slightest interest for me.

By the time he wrote his recollections, the band of men who had seen and heard the Master was growing smaller with every passing year, and it had become necessary for the younger generations to have some record. I don't think that Matthew could ever have approved of Paul; he was a follower of Peter. Paul was an interloper, a man who had come in later; Original Nazis and Primitive Fascists don't care very much for those who gain prominence after the Cause has been established when they have had naught to do with the discomforts and dangers of the early days. Matthew was a Jew of Jews, he wanted the Master's teaching to be made the foundations of a Jewish sect. Paul's universal appeal, his desire to wipe out any distinction between Jew and Gentile must have been very distasteful to the conservative, precise mind of our Biblical Mr. Penny.

However, all that doesn't matter a bit—but the fact that He, the Master, had been able to draw this man from his desk, was what first fired my imagination, and woke the beginnings of a real interest in this Man who died nineteen centuries ago. It is not an incident that is likely to be faked. When Matthew wrote his Gospel it was not popular to claim that he had once been among the lickspittle renegades who collected taxes for the Roman masters. At that time the spirit of Jewish Nationalism was becoming militantly resurgent, and Matthew does not strike me as one of that peculiar type of hysterical nitwits who fill the penitents' bench at fanatic revivalist meetings, people morbidly wallowing in a luxurious recollection of the depths of "sin" from which they deceive themselves that they

have been snatched—he had too tidy and precise a mind for that.

On this glorious morning, in the warm, bright sunshine, the hum of bees, the scent of a million flowers with a gentle breeze rippling the blue surface of the heavenly Lake, it was the Master whom I saw. Happy, young, vigorous, glorying in the respectful attention He was receiving, and exulting in the sheer beauty of His surroundings, joying in the manner in which His revolutionary teaching was being absorbed by the common folk He loved. The dark days ahead were not yet casting the least shadow.

From where I sat I could see all the important places on the Lake, trace where the cities had stood in His day. Tiberias, over there, was still a town. Tarichaea, down by the Jordan outfall, was naught but a green hummock, almost hidden by the water horizon which burned steel-dark between, leaving only the top of the fifty-foot mound visible. Magdala lay outside the green groves in the north-west corner of the beautiful estate of the English Lord Melchett, though the town was now naught but a squalid collection of miserable mud hovels. Sinnabris, where Vespasian made his headquarters for the Roman campaign against my old friend, Josephus the Chronicler, was a ruin on the hillside above Tarichaea. Kedesh, where Deborah and Barak had their rendezvous before their armies marched to drive Sisera to his death beneath Jael's hammer and murdering tenpenny nail, lay just above it, naught but a tumbled ruin. Two miles away, on a hill north of Capernaum, stands the scattered ruin of what was once Chorazin. On the eastern shore, buried amidst that



living mantle of glory spread by the wind-flowers, are the shattered fortifications of Hippos and Gamala. Closer still, on that wild hillside is Gergesa, the traditional site of the steep place down which ran the herd of swine. I read Matthew viii, 31-34, and I had a fellow-feeling for the unfortunate farmer who owned the pigs.

It was all very well for the Master to turn the demons into the swine; after all He was a Jew, and did not relish pork, bacon or a good Bath chap—but the Roman troops valued them, and it must have been a crushing loss for the poor farmer. I expect if it did happen at all, if the whole incident is not a later interpolation, that He did something for the poor fellow, although our ex-Civil Servant Matthew would not think that part of the matter worth the recording. It could have been no joke to have lost a whole herd in that drastic fashion. Perhaps, after reading verse 33, and having a good look at the precipice over which they ran, the whole thing may have been a lame excuse on the part of the farmhands to explain away their carelessness, or the fact that they had been asleep, or drinking and wenching, down in some nearby combe.

There are many figures, which stand out clear-cut—those grim, devoted, four-square, horny-fisted fishermen Simon Peter and his mates. You can see the whole band of them—Peter, Andrew, dominated by his honest, devoted, masterful brother; the youngsters James and John fired with the idea that they were going to be princes and leaders when the Messiah declared Himself and started to rule the world. Both of them certain sure that they “had got in on the ground floor”.

James and John must have been rather an aggressive couple. For the first time I relished the quiet humour of the Master in christening them Boanerges, "Sons of Thunder". That whimsy brought Him so much nearer. He was human enough to invent nicknames. He must have smiled quietly, sympathetically, at their boyish vaunts and enthusiasm.

Take a glance at Mark x, 35-45, and see the kind, and yet quite firm manner in which He "brought up with a round turn" the ambitions of the Sons of Thunder, when they began to get a little above themselves. Aye—a Man to be followed to the Death was this Master of ours. He could joke and be kindly to subordinates, but He had a very clear idea of His own dignity and knew how to enforce discipline when necessary. The young men knew where they stood when He had finished talking to them, and didn't resent it either—quite the contrary—they were still willing to die in His cause.

Yes, He was much more lovable to me now that I had seen this place where He had lived and taught. He was emerging from the false, trailing clouds of myth, and becoming a brother and a man. Playful enough to call the young boasters, with a tolerant smile of good humour, "Sons of Thunder"—that little incident touched me a great deal more than all the tales of wonder-working, of raising from the dead, and the healing of lepers. After all, the reputed lives of all great leaders are full of the same stories. Christ is not unique in having His chroniclers telling such things of Him, you may read the same of Buddha, Mahommed, Zoroaster, Zeus or Mani.

Here, already, on this wonderful morning on Galilee-side which would remain with me all my days and make my life the cleaner and sweeter for the knowledge of the Master, I was beginning to appreciate that He had been a very human Man, basically the same sort of person as any one of us. I felt that I was growing nearer to Him; that I might win an understanding of what He was, and then, I might be able to grasp what He had meant in His teaching, especially in the Sermon on the Mount.

The Mount itself was clear enough to be seen—the queer little peaks of the Horns of Hattin on top of the western mountains, standing at the head of a deep and gloomy chasm, which is now called the Vale of Doves. It was easy to imagine how and why He had gone up there.

I walked back to Tabgha in the deepest and happiest thought to do justice to the excellent lunch. Perhaps it was the sheer beauty of the shore, the warmth and pleasantness of the day—maybe it was something far deeper. The Master, the cheerful, hopeful, happy young Master who had joyed in his days down here, seemed so close to the lakeside's smiling path.

I was surrounded by the tumbled ruins of antiquity, the atmosphere of ancient days was all round—the Master had been dead near two thousand years, and He should have been as much of an antiquity as any of the fallen stones around me. That morning He had been—now He was beside me. I could hear His cheerful voice, see the merry twinkle in His eye as he invented that nickname for James and John. Never again would He be a dim and awful Figure, swathed

in the mists of mystery and superstition, or dusty beneath the grime of the centuries.

To me He was alive, and I did not worry one little bit whether or no He was God. The thought did not enter my mind—I was as happy as a grig because I had found a friend, and I was anxious now to read His teaching carefully, feeling that I could begin to understand its simple and direct message.

I was not “converted”—at least not in the conventional sense—though I had made the startling discovery that the Master was a very real Man, more, the very best and most human of men. I had no wish to go and read the Bible because it was the Bible, as some mystic and awe-boding tome, but I did want to read and understand the teaching of this Man whose own lively humour, understanding and personal touch could give us a new heaven upon earth if we would but practise what He taught.

I am not a bit spiritual, I am not concerned in the slightest part with what may, or may not, happen to me after I have done my last human action and my body ceases to function as an intelligent machine—but I am vitally interested in trying desperately hard to understand how His teachings can make a Heaven of this mad old world of ours.

I shall start worrying about things spiritual when we have matters corporeal in decent shape. There has been too much of this Lazarus and Dives business in the past few thousand years—of enduring vile and intolerable conditions drugged by the promise of a Heaven beyond the grave. The sheer vindictiveness of hoping to find all the rich and comfortable roasting

eternally, and of having the infinite and selfish solace of refusing them a drink of water, seems a queer sort of Heaven to me. I could not be happy if I had to watch a brother or a sister suffer whilst I had the power to give relief. The smug self-complacency of the "unco guid" who hope to derive most of their immortal bliss from a complacent contemplation of others being tortured, whilst they recline at ease in orchestra-stalls in the forefront of Abraham's bosom, is a thing which I have never understood.

The more I think of it, the deeper I am convinced that it was of this world and to abolish its wretched conditions that the gallant, quietly gay, whimsically humorous and intrinsically human Man referred in most of His teachings; He knew that the rest, the things of the spirit, would follow in natural order, when physical and material matters had been ironed out.

## CHAPTER NINE

I HIRED a car by telephone from Tiberias. The Arab driver was not at all anxious to go out on the roads unless I would join one of the military convoys, but when he heard that I only wanted to go to the Horns of Hattin, he agreed to risk it. It is not very far, about five miles from Tabgha round the Lake shore to Tiberias, and perhaps four from there, up the mountain side, to the plateau upon which stands the queerly-shaped little hill of the Horns of Hattin.

I had a double reason for wanting to go up there. The Horns are, traditionally, and probably accurately, the site of the Sermon on the Mount, and, certainly, they are the place where the Crusaders fought the great battle against Saladin and his Saracens on 4th July, 1187, which led to the loss of Jerusalem, and, in its turn, to the faring-forth of Lion-heart upon the Voyage of God. The link between the two incidents lies not only in the spiritual, but is also in a physical one, for it was after this battle that Holy Rood, the True Cross, upon which it was believed the Master died, was seen for the last time. Whether or not it was the actual gibbet upon which He died matters not at all—millions of men for seven centuries had believed it to be—and for that faith had laid down their lives. The object which irradiated their devotion, drew its sanctity, in

my view, from that outpouring of love and veneration, irrespective of its authenticity.

The history of the Relic is rather interesting. The Cross—I am not arguing about its authenticity, for in that I am not interested in the least—was found by Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great, the first Christian Emperor of Rome—"Christian", though he did his best to make sure of his "fire insurance" (and no one had more cause) by refusing baptism until he lay on his deathbed. You may not laugh at that as superstition if you belong to an organized and dogmatic Church—though I do not see the logically-minded Master endorsing such a superstition—for orthodox dogmas insist that the sacrament of baptism washes out all previous guilt and leaves the soul snow-white, guiltless before God and free of all accrued punishment. After reading Constantine's life-story, in which the murder of his own son, Crispus, was one of the least crimes, I hope the brute found that his superstitious postponement of receiving water on his head did not do him any good when he made his Last Accounting. Still, to at least one Church, he is a canonized saint.

You have not to look very far for links between Britain and Palestine—Constantine is another one. He was Yorkshire-born. "Saint" Helena—it seems that you had only to be prominent enough, especially in the early centuries, to win honour upon the altars of the Church—was the mistress of Constantius, and Constantine, her son, was a bastard. Legend says that she was the daughter of Old King Cole; but she was, more probably, a barmaid who struck the roving fancy

of the Roman general, and then was clever enough to keep her position. She had a tremendous influence over her son, and he even struck coins bearing her image.

When she was an old woman, and, like so many, full of intolerant repentance when the fires of youth have become cold ashes with the chill of age, she came out to Palestine and busied herself in erecting churches and cathedrals over every possible, and impossible, site which might have had any connexion with the reported incidents of the life of the Master. She is credited with having found three crosses on the spot which was pointed out to her as Mount Calvary—though the legend has its weak points. To explain away some of the discrepancies she is credited with having only rediscovered the Precious Relic—the Cross is now said to have been carefully preserved during the lifetime of James, the Master's brother, by Protonice, wife of Claudius, though why such a distinguished lady had anything to do with hiding a criminal's gibbet is more than I can say; yet she was a woman, and, as such, capable of any kindness. In any case, it doesn't matter.

What *does* matter, though, is that that stump of blackened wood inspired more selfless devotion and heroism than any other inanimate thing which has ever existed. Two million men died during the Crusade in its cause, and to this day there are millions who would lay down their lives to defend the small fragments which Helena sent to Rome and Constantinople, and from these centres to a hundred other places throughout Christendom. A large piece is still



exposed in a church in Rome on the Third Sunday in Lent, on 3rd May, and on Good Friday.

The drive from Tabgha along the Lake shore to Tiberias is a beautiful one at this Spring season of the year. After you descend the low ridge, the road runs across the plain towards the hills of Galilee, towering above the western water-brim amongst the same living carpet of flowers and vegetation. I saw, for the first time at close quarters, something of what the Jewish colonists are doing.

Close to the corner of the Lake they have neatly cultivated and well laid out farms, mainly concerned with growing oranges and bananas. I stopped the car and walked across to see some details of this business. A Jewish farmer, a barrel-chested, sun-burned man in khaki breeches and a white, sleeveless cotton singlet, with a flat cloth cap on his head met me. I told him that I was an English farmer, and begged his pardon for trespassing. He laughed, throwing back his head and letting the roaring chuckle come from right down deep in his hairy chest.

"Don't worry about trespassing," he said, in perfect English. "What would you like to see? I'll be only too glad to show you."

I passed some remark about his English, and he laughed again.

"Why, man, I was an Englishman like 'yourself,'" he said.

The use of the past tense rather took me aback. I asked him what he meant by it.

He looked thoughtful for a moment, and then a slow grin spread over his broad, honest face.

"It must be Palestine," he said. "You can't realize what happens when a Jew comes out here, but then you're not a Government official and so won't understand how they look at us. You see, when a Jew arrives here, he immediately becomes on the same dead-level as a native—something just equal to an Arab, and a long way beneath the notice of the lordly British official.

"I used to resent it when I first came, but now I can see that it's about the greatest compliment they could pay us, though they've no intention of being flattering. Jews from Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Poland, America, the Yemen or anywhere else, all become level—we're Jews, and just the same as 'wogs'—the name they give the Palestinians. I suppose that's why I said I *was* an Englishman—nationality has rather gone out of my mind of recent years. I am a Jew of *Eretz Israel*."

"I suppose that you are an Englishman still, aren't you?" I asked.

"No," he repeated slowly, "I am a Jew of *Eretz Israel*."

I suppose my puzzlement showed on my face.

"Sorry," he said, "*Eretz Israel* is our name for Palestine. It means Israel's Homeland. I speak more Hebrew than I do English, nowadays. Come on, I'll show you what I can, it may interest you."

He was a fine fellow, and I took the greatest interest in all that he showed me. The irrigation channels were a marvel to me, who had never seen this kind of agriculture, and I was astonished at the minute care needed for the growing of bananas—the wind-breaks,

the matting screens, and all the rest of it. I made one discovery that startled me; I had always liked Jaffa oranges, but I only now found out why they had their distinctive flavour. The Jaffa orange is not an orange at all! It is a lemon-orange hybrid, for the roots are those of a lemon tree, with an orange top grafted on to it.

The farmer showed me his root crop and a fine vegetable field where he was working hard to acclimatize some of our Scottish potatoes. He was not having much luck, but there were quite a number of our vegetables, turnips, swedes, radishes, parsnips and lettuce in a condition finer than any I have grown in Dorset. Tomatoes, he told me, were far better than anything seen at home, and he was hoping for a large market for Palestinian tomatoes to serve as some compensation for the tremendous glut of the citrus trade, oranges, lemons and grapefruit.

We came to politics, of course; you cannot keep away from them in the Holy Land, where they are a matter of such vital importance. Politics may send carefully tended crops roaring to the night skies in a cloud of smoke and flame at any moment, with odds on that the farmer will be cremated on the funeral-pyre of his own produce.

He told me that they had very little trouble with the local Bedouins, who all seemed very well disposed to the Jewish colonists. Because their farms were on the main road they had not suffered any serious attacks, for police and troops were always passing by their gates and hedges, but, at any time, some gang of desperadoes from north of the international border,

inspired by the Safed agitators, might swoop down upon them.

I asked him what he thought of the new plan to divide Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, and found that he was not very much in favour of it.

"It may be all right just now," he said. "This country is very important to the British Empire because of its geographical position, and more so, for the purposes of strategy. You can call Palestine the cross-roads of the world, for the main air-routes between Europe and Asia, not to mention Australia, must pass over it; but times may change, and we may, some day, not be so very necessary to British strategy and Imperial needs as we are to-day.

"I don't think that Britain would ever willingly abandon us, but then she may be hard pressed in some other part of the world, and not have the strength available to help us. In that case we can't hope to stand against the Arabs. Our Jewish State would be trampled flat in a mire of our own blood. It's not very flattering to our pride to feel that we are dependent upon the goodwill of a foreign Empire, is it?"

"There doesn't seem to be much chance of Britain's needs slackening so far as Palestine is concerned," I said.

He looked doubtful. "I don't know so much about that," he said. "Tension with Italy and her allies is one of the main reasons for Palestine's present importance. With a real peace in Europe England will no longer be so deeply interested in us—that's why we're so scared."

"But you can't expect an eternal state of alarm and

tension," I said. "Surely you don't mean that you want the present sort of near-war to continue, do you?"

"Not at all," he said testily; "you seem to have missed my whole point. I'm saying that it is all very well to talk about the Partition business whilst we have Britain doing a great deal to help us; but, if anything happened by which she could not continue to do so, or if she lost interest in us, we should be doomed to massacre."

"Surely that's not likely," I protested.

"Not at present," he said simply; "but we Jews are not building for our own lifetime; we are five thousand years old, you know, and we are working for the remote future of our race. We want to lay the foundations of a happy, secure and respected Land of Israel. Do you think that we have sacrificed all the blood we have lost, allowed our veins to be filled with malaria, and poured out millions of pounds, to see the whole thing go up in smoke and flame at the hands of fanatical Arabs?"

"Listen, you may not realize it—but I was not born to be a farmer—neither were ninety per cent of the men and women who work on the land in this country. I, personally, was a Mathematics professor in one of our Universities—and thousands of my comrades were men and women in the professions—we haven't turned ourselves into peasants, and doomed our children to be peasants, for any light reason. Israel is rich in every class of people, but we realized long ago that, if we are to be a landed people, living in our own country, we had to have peasants, and the only way to form a

peasant class was for thousands of us to sacrifice ourselves.

"We're not looking for any praise or admiration—it was a plain need, and we responded to it—but do get the idea firmly planted in your brain that we are in earnest. We want to see some solution of the present problem which is going to assure our children and grandchildren that our sacrifices have not been made in vain. You're a farmer, and you will understand better than most, what a grip the land you own and work obtains upon you."

I nodded my head, for I could realize that clearly enough. I'd fight to the last ditch for my own acres in West Dorset.

"Then, is there any answer to the problem of Palestine?" I asked.

"Of course there is," he replied. "If we can get rid of all these pious frauds and shams of which we have heard so much, we shall be able to look at stark facts. It's simple enough—take the position in sheer honesty and wipe out all the tongue-clatter. Palestine was conquered by Britain—she has been conquered more than a score of times before, and there is nothing strange in that. Palestine is, and always will be, of paramount importance to Britain, if for nothing else than her position on the map—Britain does not wish to exasperate Moslem feelings—so long as her own vital interests are not concerned. No one can say that we Jews would not be faithful to her—we've got no choice, even if we did wish for some other protector. Then, for pity's sake, let the present uncertainty be ended. Partition Palestine at once, but not between

Arabs and Jews—make it a division between Britain and Arabs. Britain's share can be populated by Jews, made into a Dominion, or, because of its tiny size, an autonomous colony. We shall be an integral part of the British Empire, and that will save us from being overrun by the Arabs from all around."

"There's only one objection that I can see," I said. "You mentioned that your dread was that Britain might find her hands full in some other part of the world, and that when Palestine was no longer so vitally important, you might be abandoned. Surely that objection will still apply, even if you call yourselves a British Colony?"

"Not at all," he replied. "If we are merely a strange sort of bastard protectorate, Britain might leave us to our fate, but if we are part and parcel of the Empire it will be quite a different story."

My Arab driver was blowing his horn long and furiously, and I was afraid that I should be left to walk back to Tabgha. I excused myself and was soon back in the car, with quite a lot of fresh material over which to ponder.

In a couple of minutes the road turned southwards, and I saw a huddle of blue-grey mud-hovels clustered just beneath the mountain, which here comes within a couple of hundred yards of the gravel beach. This was Magdala—and thoughts of Mary Magdalene came to my mind at once—I wonder if any woman in history has ever been saddled with a bad reputation quite so undeservedly as poor Mary from Magdala?

When I had thought of her—and that wasn't often, for I had forgotten all about her after I left school's

Scripture lessons—it was as the fallen woman who poured some messy ointment over the Master's feet whilst He was having dinner in the Pharisee's house, or, with the woman taken in adultery.

She had been all mixed up with Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus at Bethany, and I had been surprised when I found that she was quite another person. She was merely one of a company of healed epileptics such as Mrs. Chuza, Mary of Cleophas, Salome and the rest, who took charge of the Master's commissariat, saw to the repairing of His clothes, to His laundry-work and all the hundred and one little things that a man needs a woman to overlook, if he is to live in any state of comfort or cleanliness.

Poor Mary! Luke the physician says that she had had seven devils cast out of her by the Master, by which I take it that she had been some wretched nervous wreck, subject to fits, and probably a little unbalanced in her mind until His kindly hand and unfailing sympathy cured her, and gave her back her sanity and health. In any case she richly repaid Him for His kindness, for she stood by Him even when He was undergoing shameful execution, and she still cared for Him after she thought His course was run, for she was the woman who was hastening to the Sepulchre to perform the last offices which had been left unfinished because of the Sabbath intervening.

Poor, kind, devoted, loyal Mary of Magdala; it seems all wrong that she should be saddled with the reputation of being a reformed harlot. I could see her as a rather bewildered, but passionately grateful spinster of uncertain age—an Oriental edition of the



grey old maids who make carpet slippers for the Vicar and Curate at the Women's Institute.

A lot more than that, perhaps, for her unswerving devotion took her into many dangerous situations; she faced a lot of hardship and suffering to be beside Him at the end on Calvary. That is a far better way to think of her than as a flashing blonde who had struck the primrose path, and then spent the rest of her days in weeping noisily and pouring out costly ointments on the tired feet of the Master. Patron saint of kindly old maiden aunts would be more in keeping with what she was, for she had all the virtues of withered spinsterhood, and none of the vices; that devoted love of hers for the gallant, tired figure of the Master shows only too clearly her noble Spirit. Only a real friend could have stood at the foot of the shameful gibbet and comforted Him in His last agony-suffused moments.

I think that busy Mary of Magdala would be more hurt at being confounded with Mary of Bethany, than she in being mistaken for the reformed fallen woman.

Industrious Mary probably thought far less favourably of the lazy woman who lounged about the guest-room and left all the work to Martha her sister, than she did of the other girl who had once followed the oldest profession, and repented. Wearily and often she must have shaken her middle-aged head, with the sparse, greying hair scraped back into a bun, as she argued with Judas Iscariot, to see if the communal purse would run to buying a couple of scrawny fowls—and you must see Palestinian hens to know how emaciated chickens can be and still live. Or have stood with

reddened forearms after a hard day's washing in some stream, when the Master's burning spirit allowed Him to rest for a day or so, and laundry-work could be done. Maybe that white garment, "woven without seam", was part of the sweet-hearted old maid's task.

Aye, Mary of Magdala is a lovable figure. Think of the housewifely pride she took in getting that garment snow-white—or, maybe, her joy when she had woven it in the first place. God rest her! There are few of the spinster sisterhood whose hearts have all the abnegation and selfless joy that she had. So it is Mary the Old Maid I shall carry in my memory—not Mary the Scarlet Woman who reformed and spent her time in luxurious and lounging repentance, pouring out boxes of ointment.

The others, too; Mrs. Chuza; she must have been a sore embarrassment to her husband with her trapesing about the country in the wake of the band of unemployed fishermen and village zealots who surrounded the rather "not quite" figure of the Non-conformist hedgerow Preacher who was seeking to turn the world upside down. Chuza, Herod's steward, I expect, had quite a few words with the gentle Joanna on the subject. I wonder if Mary of Magdala had to solace the rather hysterical wife when she was torn between duty to husband and attraction to the personality and teaching of the young Nazareth rabbi?

I do not think that Mary could have been physically attractive—she was a cured epileptic, and, anyway, the women who are usually found in the forefront of some new movement are seldom Helens or Cleopatras. I expect that she was a little, dowdy, brown mouse,

with her hair just turning grey, flat-chested, with cheek-bones protruding, but with a heart of gold beating beneath her skimpy bosom—and that's a whole sight better than being a voluptuous Hebe when it comes to the real things of life and death.

## CHAPTER TEN

THE road passed along a shelf of the mountain after we had left Magdala, with the Lake a good sixty to one hundred feet below. Nearer Tiberias it ran with one side almost in the water, pinched between mountain and beach.

There were two or three boats hauled up in a small, roughly-constructed shelter behind a breakwater where the Arab fishermen were sitting on the shingly beach, mending and drying their seine-nets, much as their forefathers have done for thirty centuries and more. The Sea of Galilee is plentifully stocked with many varieties of good, edible fish, though they all seem rather bony when you get your fork into them. One sort is called St. Peter's Fish, and is, of course, supposed to be of the same species as the one in which the coin of the tribute was found.

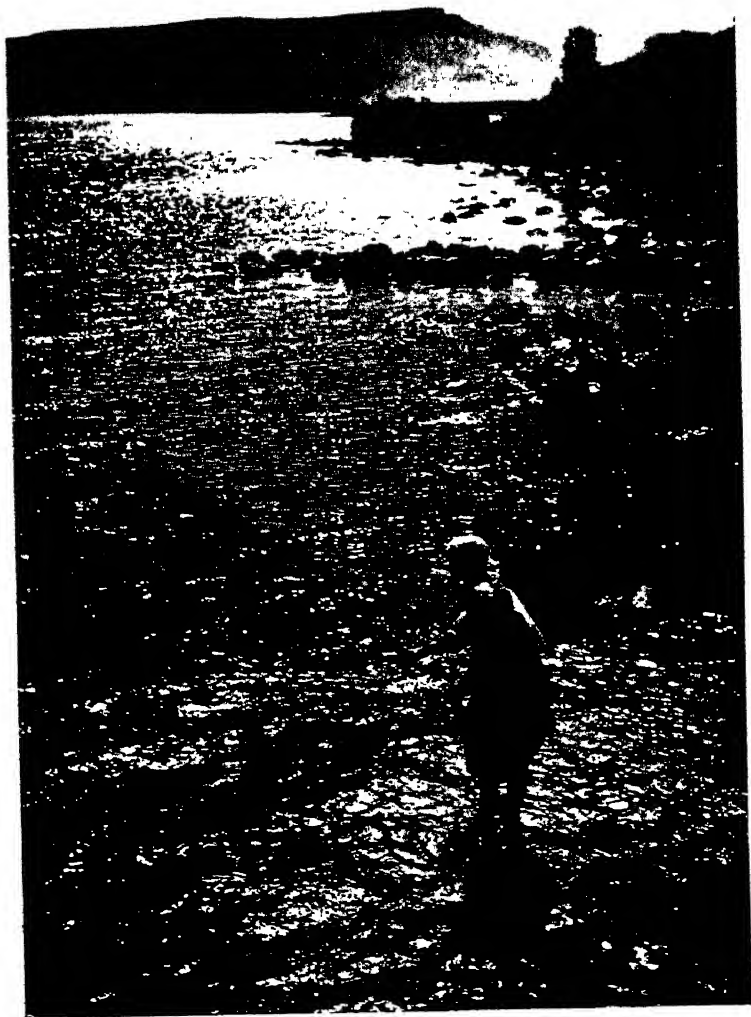
Tiberias is not very interesting. There are several round towers and walls still standing, but these are fairly modern, built by a Turkish pasha in the middle of the eighteenth century, and destroyed by an earthquake in the middle of the last. The city of the Master's day was about a mile to the south, close to the warm springs—there are some remains of a wall and towers down there to show where it stood.

The Arabs have a proverb that the King of the Fleas lives in Tiberias, and the old houses of the native

quarter certainly looked fit palaces for His Verminous Majesty. There are a couple of hotels; the Franciscan Friars have a pilgrim hospice; and the Scots Hospital occasionally receives guests. On the natural terraces of the hillside above stands the new Jewish suburb; the houses looked very clean, modern and attractive, with the huge bulk of a sanatorium looking above them. The ruins of a castle stand behind the main hotel, though it is a very small fortress, much shattered by the earthquake which ruined the town, and now does duty as stables and jail for the Palestine Police detachment.

The road winds up the mountain side in great sweeping curves, whilst the loveliness of the Spring-tide Lake takes your breath away as you mount the higher and get the fuller view. On the crest you come to a rolling plateau of darkish-grey stone outcrops, a-smother in a glory of wild flowers, most of them lupins dancing in the cool uplands breeze, growing in tall, glowing clumps of every conceivable colour.

The car stopped on the side of the road, close to the saddle-shaped hill which is called the Horns of Hattin—my immediate goal. I alighted and took the three books I wanted, a Bible, Meisterman's Guide, and Archer's *History of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*. My driver said that he would wait for an hour, but that, if I was likely to be any longer, he would go away and return for me after about four hours. I told him to carry on, as I expected that I should need all that time. He gave a sniff of disgust, his face showing that he considered all Westerners mad, but shrugged his shoulders, engaged his gears, and sped away.



*Photo. American Colony in Jerusalem*

## THE LAKE OF GALILEE



It was not more than three hundred yards to the Horns. I tramped over the rough, broken ground, breast high in lupins, and, in a few minutes, reached the summit. The hill must have been a volcano at one time, for it encloses a circular cup very like a Roman amphitheatre—and I felt that, for once, tradition had not lied, for here was the ideal setting for the Sermon on the Mount. A great crowd of people could have been accommodated in this natural Bowl, and would have heard every word addressed to them by the Man who sat on the inner slope of the higher of the two Horns.

The view is superb. Far in the northern distance glittered the snow-cap of Mount Hermon. The mountains of Upper Galilee ran up to the white-flecked skies like the back-cloth of a theatre, and, conspicuous upon its crest, stood Safed. There can be no manner of doubt about it, looked at from Hattin, Safed must be the "city that is set upon a hill cannot be hid", which is mentioned in Matthew v, 14. Safed is such a conspicuous, familiar landmark, that it was the natural thing for the Master to have pointed it out to his audience as He sat in the mountain bowl giving the Foundation Sermon of Christianity.

As I have rather laboured to point out, I am no orthodox believer—but by taking the trouble to come here to the Horns of Hattin I became convinced that the Sermon on the Mount was no sham, no invention of a chronicler. Many of the words may have been altered, for the record was written long years after Calvary had seemingly closed what His contemporaries considered the career of another Nationalist agitator,



yet someone who was there on Hattin, and heard Him speak, had much to do with the setting down of the Tale. "Internal evidence" is what the critics call it, I believe; the Gospel narrative of the Sermon on the Mount simply seethes with internal evidence. The sight of Safed on its hill-top put me at once in touch with the events of that Spring day when He made a full statement of the message he felt within His heart, and so laid the foundation-stone of His creed.

The second item in the narrative which struck me as showing its authenticity, was Matthew vi, 28, 29 and 30.

"And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

"And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

"Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

These flowers around Hattin which struck me so mightily with their magnificence made the same impression of wonder and awe upon Him. It was such a natural simile for Him to have used to draw the attention of the crowd listening to Him.

Aye, Safed on its hill-crest, and the wealth and prodigal profusion of the flowers, go a very long way as you stand upon Hattin, to make you give respectful attention to the words of the Sermon on the Mount. Carefully, and very slowly, I read through the fifth, sixth and seventh chapters of Matthew. I didn't turn

to any of the other chroniclers to discover their versions, for I had no wish to confuse my mind.

There was much that I did not understand—there were many passages which grated—many that seemed to have been added in support of some theory or doctrine formulated long after He had died on His gibbet; but there was much that fitted into my very fallible conception of what He seemed to imply as far as I am personally concerned. Try reading those chapters for yourself; take them at their plain face value as a counsel of sober common sense, which, if followed, would make this world of ours a cleaner, saner, more likeable place.

If I was in any danger of doubting the Manhood of the Master—and I was not, for I could not bring myself to the traditional view, of thinking of Him in the terms which the centuries and generations of priestcraft have made out of that simple, lovable Figure—I soon found all that I needed to make me realize that He had been a man in every sense.

How He hated pretence and hypocrisy—a large section of the Discourse is on that very subject—and the folk who nowadays make the noisiest pretence of following Him are just the type He most detested. You know what I mean; donating noisily a large sum to charities to make sure that your name is at the top of the list, so people will consider you a person of charitable heart. Or the clapper-tongued hags in our Dorset villages who strain every nerve to decry poor Mary Ellen who has become an unmarried mother. Mary Ellen can do what she likes so long as she does not break the Eleventh Commandment—"Thou shalt

not be found out ", the Commandment which we strive to obey more rigidly than we do any of the others.

Read the Sermon on the Mount—read it in a spirit of stark honesty—if you are not too deeply armoured in your carapace of hypocrisy it will do you a power of good, as it did me.

It was easy to imagine the scene that was once here. The Master I did not picture; I hope I never shall form any materialisation of Him in my mind—I suppose those stained-glass windows of the blond-bearded, empty-faced young man are still too strong. I have got rid of them now, but I have no mental picture to put in their place—yet most of the secondary characters were clear enough. There would have been a full muster of them on that lovely morning to hear the first full explanation of the new philosophy expounded by the young Rabbi from Nazareth.

First of all, chief amongst his peers, Simon Peter. His image needed little to fix it in my mind. A man very like the fishermen I had seen on the Lake—a little elderly, perhaps, grey streaks in his crisp, short beard—stocky—sturdy—bronzed face with clear, light brown eyes—dressed in a pair of black pants, girded with a cord at the waist and tight to the ankles; a shirt of dark-coloured stuff much bleached by long wear and exposure to the weather; his head bound with what we should call a tea-cloth in this country, a piece of coarse white linen with a red or green stripe in it.

Andrew, a younger edition of his brother, sitting beside him. The two "Sons of Thunder", young, keen-faced, rather carefully dressed in their best to

point the fact that they considered themselves high in the Master's favour—and would soon be sitting in the highest seats, princes in the Empire which He, the Messiah, was to form as soon as He declared Himself. Somehow I think that James and John were a little disappointed with the Sermon on the Mount—they believed that He would issue the call to arms at this foundation meeting, and start enrolling the legions by which the enemies of Israel would be overthrown.

Judas, the red-headed patriot from the little inland village near Shechem, probably thought the same, and imagined himself already as Lord High Treasurer of the new World-Empire.

And the rest of His followers—Matthew—our ex-Civil Servant, was probably quite content with the new spiritual leadership; he had too intelligent a fear of the might of Cæsar to think that the Master was about to launch a new rebellion which could hope to shatter the iron-bound legions of Imperial Rome.

Matthew was, I am sure, more than a little timid, he was no man of action. In his day there were so many of these plots to overthrow Rome, all of them ending in death and misery, in men writhing out their lives upon Roman roadside crosses. Men were setting themselves up to be Messiahs on every second Sabbath—and Matthew must have seen some of the dreadful figures of discredited plotters gasping out their tortured lives on their gibbets after their little plots had failed disastrously. Take a glance at Josephus, or Dean Milman, if you wish to form some idea of the political background in Palestine at the time when the Master was preaching. It was not very dissimilar to the present

state of affairs. The foreign rulers were alarmed at the upsurge of Nationalist feeling, and were not sparing with their death-sentences, any more than our British military officers and Administrators are to-day.

Then there was the company of women: Mary of Magdala, Mrs. Joanna Chuza, Salome, the Mother of Cleophas, and, maybe Marymother herself, standing anxious and proud, afraid and joyful, fearful because this Son of hers was emerging into dangerous prominence.

Galilee was particularly unsettled at that moment, for there was a new political religious sect then very active; those Zealots who, thirty years afterwards, were to wage death-defying war with Rome.

What I got out of my visit to the Scene of the Sermon on the Mount was personal contact with the Person of the Master. The little odds and ends in the discourse which I have already mentioned—they carried deep-rooted conviction, gave me what I needed for my future programme of the coming winter—the ability to read and understand more of what He taught, now that I had some fixed idea of what He did.

There are many other associations connected with these Horns. On the same place where He sat and taught, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy", took place one of the most merciless events in all the world's history.

On 4th July, 1187, there stood on this peak the tent of that craven, Guy of Lusignan, King of Jerusalem, a French adventurer who had won the crown because ~~he~~ had married the Princess Sybil, the heiress to the

throne. The story of the whole business of filthy intrigue and treachery is as nasty a page of history as any there are. Saladin had invaded Palestine for a variety of reasons, not the least of them the kidnapping and maltreatment of his sister by Reginald of Kerak, as unscrupulous an adventurer as Guy, though a braver and more able man than his king.

Saladin was besieging Tiberias when the whole mass of the Crusading levy came marching east from Sephoris, the old capital of Galilee, a couple of miles from Nazareth. He moved up the mountain side and threw his army across the path of the Crusaders. The Franks were mad with thirst, for there were not sufficient springs and wells to supply a large army, let alone its horses, on the road from Nazareth.

The battle started at sunrise, on Friday, 3rd July, and lasted throughout the day. During the night both sides stood to arms, until, at sunrise, the fighting roared out anew. By that time the men of the Red Cross were in desperate straits; they had lost thousands in the previous day's battle, and their distress for lack of water was most terrible.

Once again this gorgeous mantle of flowers and vegetation comes into the picture. In July it is nothing but khaki-brown tinder, desiccated and withered by the heat of the burning sun. Saladin ordered it to be fired, and the strangling smoke, coupled with the searing heat, completed the rout of the Crusaders. A few hundred men in stained surcoats and battered ring-mail formed their shield-wall round this Hill of the Horns of Hattin, with the king's pavilion in the centre, whilst, on the very crest stood the Wood of

Holy Cross as their rallying-point—brought into action as their sure gage of victory.

It was of no avail. At long last, when there were no more men to fill the gaps hewn in the shield-wall, the Saracens broke through the mail-clad ring around Holy Rood. For hours the Crusaders had retreated farther and farther upwards as their comrades dropped and they were forced to make their circle smaller. At last the end came—down fluttered the tent of King Guy, and up went the silk pavilion of Saladin.

The scene was as clear to my imagination as had been the vision of the engrossed crowd listening to the first official statement of the Master. I could almost see the weary, staggering, haggard-faced survivors of the Crusading host, in their hacked mail, all stained with blood and foul with the smoke of the burnt scrub. Around them raged and frothed the hordes of white-clad Saracens, pulling them towards the tent which had just been erected.

I could feel their agony of soul when they saw the Cross being used for a tug-of-war by a hundred screaming Bedouins, all struggling to prise away its coating of precious stones with their dagger points, and then flinging it into some still-smouldering patch of vegetation to make their task the easier, and to destroy totally the hated Symbol. Holy Rood was never seen again, though Saladin and later Paynim rulers for long pretended that it was still in their possession.

In the Sultan's tent followed a terrible scene. Of all the Crusaders Saladin most hated Reginald of Kerak—and Reginald was amongst the prisoners who were brought before him. Try to picture the scene.

Saladin looked at the grimy, bloodstained, helmetless, empty-scabbarded men in hacked mail, and passed his silver cup, charged with foaming sherbet chilled with snow brought from Mount Hermon, to King Guy. The sight of the cool drink must have been as a glimpse of Paradise to these wounded, weary, parched men who had suffered the agonies of the damned from thirst. King Guy drank deep, and then passed the cup to his neighbour—Reginald. Instantly Saladin invoked the Eastern code of hospitality.

“Bear witness all,” he called, “it is the Christian king who gives this rogue to drink, not I. Reginald the Dog is no guest of mine—he cannot shelter beneath my hospitality—I have offered him naught.”

Reginald was a man of nearly sixty—a very old man by the standard of those days—but still one of the strongest and most feared warriors of his day. He had done everything that a man may do in the way of vileness. As a young French knight he came to the Holy Land in the train of Eleanor of Aquitaine, then Queen to Louis of France; she who was, later, by another husband, mother to our own Lion-heart. Reginald remained behind after selfish intrigues and incestuous lust caused the failure of that expedition—and married the young widowed Constance, Princess of Antioch. Murder, treachery, betrayal of friends, brigandage, banditry, truce-breaking, church-burning, sacrilege, piracy on the high seas, looting, rape, plundering, kidnapping—he had committed them all. Through his overmastering ambition he had wrecked and ruined the Crusading Kingdom, every corpse stark in the burned scrub lay there to his account, he was



yet very much a man. Fearless, wise in war, the bravest of the brave, he was a child of his times. He had been arrogant and proud in his prosperity, and now, though he knew only too well that his own death was upon him, he showed no signs of cowardice.

He smiled widely out of his dirty, battle-stained grizzled face; fearlessly he grinned into the face of the enemy lusting for his blood, and, still smiling, reached out for the proffered cup. "I care not who offers me a drink," he said. "If it were Satan himself, I'd give thanks to the Prince of Hell for his courtesy," and with that drank his fill.

Saladin could no longer contain himself, lashing himself to fury, he called Reginald by every vile name to which he could lay his tongue, and most of them were true. Finally he offered Reginald his life on condition of apostasy, of turning Moslem. Reginald, that grim, dour old warrior looked steadily at him.

"Sultan," he said simply, "I have never concerned myself about the Sieur Christ. I have not considered Him in any way; I have taken no notice of His teaching, or His laws. In no way may I call myself a servant of Jesus of Nazareth. But to save myself from death, and to give you, Paynim dog, the chance to say that Reginald denied his Master to preserve his life, do you think that I am coward and traitor enough to deny Him who died for me upon that Rood your men have destroyed? No, I confess myself a Christian man, and a very sinful follower of the Sieur Christ, and in that faith will I die."

He stood bolt upright, his grey head above the ~~folded~~ coil of his mail, for his helmet had been wrenched

from his head when he was captured. "Strike, thou damned dog," he said, looking the slaving Saladin between the eyes. Slowly he crossed himself on brow, breast and shoulders. Then quietly, meek for the first time in all his haughty days, he folded his arms. "Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit," he said firmly. With the last word on his lips, Saladin's slender sword flashed in the level rays of the setting sun streaming through the tent-flaps, and that proud head leaped from the war-worn shoulders.

Reginald of Chatillon, Lord of Kerak, once Prince of Antioch and General of the Kingdom, pirate, brigand, murderer, lecher, bandit, traitor, selfish self-seeking intriguer, had come to his ending, one of the martyr-band who, in all ages and all countries, have died rather than deny the Master who taught His creed of truth, of pity, of purity, upon the very same spot upon which Reginald's headless trunk subsided to the earth.

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."

If there is anything true in this tale of Heaven and Hell of which we have been told, then Reginald will be a fitter figure in it than some of the canonized saints—Constantine the Great is catalogued as a saint by a great section of Christians—even Pontius Pilate is in the altar-list of one Church.

Two hundred Brethren of the Hospitallers and Templars died in the same fashion here upon Hattin, when they refused to purchase their lives at the price of denying the Master.

Truly the Horns of Hattin is a hallowed place! I wonder if I should have had the strength to do as Reginald and the military monks did? I pray that I would—racial pride might help me as it did him—but I doubt it, I doubt it. Therefore my reverence for them must needs be all the greater.

Another thought struck me—an inconsequential one—the date of the Battle in which the Cross was lost. Is there just blind coincidence in that day of 4th July?

It saw the death of one of the noblest conceptions that has ever irradiated the mind of man—the Crusading Kingdom which might have been so great if only human flesh could have attained the heights of human spirit. 4th July saw, too, the birth of what may yet prove to be Mankind's salvation—the rise of that great country the United States of America where, if the spirit of its Fathers can only be translated into daily life, all may yet be well.

I had plenty of material upon which to reflect that evening when I got back to Tabgha.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

I WAS sitting on the lawn in front of the Hospice. The air was soft and delightfully warm, though there was no need to shed one's jacket. The moon was bright over Galilee, the stars shone more brilliantly than they do even on frosty nights above Eggardun in Dorset, seeming twice as friendly, and four times as large.

My companion was a little American lady. She must have been close on sixty, but she was one of that beautiful American type—the white-haired grandmother with the fresh cheeks of a girl which you don't seem to find in any other race. Her mind was that of a fresh and vigorous woman of thirty-five; in body she seemed about the same age. She was sparkling, vivacious, and extremely well-read—and by that I don't mean with that sort of top-dressing you so often meet, culled from short articles in popular magazines, which makes people appear learned if the conversation does not last more than five minutes.

She was something like myself in her outlook on this matter of Bible and Palestine—she shared my great reverence for the Person and words of the Master, but she was more than a little sceptical of the conventional interpretations of His teaching. She was quite prepared to be convinced of any orthodox doctrine if

only someone could do so in a logical fashion, but no one seemed to be able to manage it—very much my own case.

We were sitting and talking over what each of us had thought and experienced during a visit to Capernaum; she also had gone there on foot and alone. Out on the lake, about three hundred yards from the shore, lay a fishing-boat. The men did not seem to be doing anything, probably they were resting. Suddenly there was a sound of oars and another boat came gliding towards the one we had been watching. Shouts roared across the still water, the two boats came together with a grinding bump, and, instantly, there was the sound of desperate fighting, blows, grunts, curses, screams and roars, followed by heavy splashes.

My companion went inside at once; like any woman worthy of the name, she detested ruffianism and violence, especially when it grated so badly as it did this moonlight night on the peaceful waters of Galilee. A servant who was in charge of the guest-quarters was busy telephoning to Tiberias Police Barracks, and when he had done it, came out and told me not to worry, it was only one of the usual squabbles between Jewish and Arab fishermen.

"They are a very ancient and very jealous guild, these Arab fishermen," he said. "They are always fighting with the Jews who come fishing on what these Arabs think is their own preserve."

"Are the supplies of fish short?" I asked.

He laughed. "The lake is teeming with them. If there were ten times as many fishermen there would still be room for everyone. It's just jealousy—the

Arabs have fished here for centuries, and they resent interlopers."

"Do the Jewish fishermen spoil the Arabs' markets?" I asked.

"Not a bit of it, there is always a demand for the lake fish. People would buy a dozen times the usual landings," he answered.

"Then do the Jews use modern methods which the Arabs fear will spoil the fishing-grounds?"

"Not so far as I know," he answered. "They employ the same nets as the Arabs, and they're certainly far more particular about returning under-size fish."

By this time the noise of fighting had ceased. There was a sound of several men swimming to the beach. Then came brutal laughter, followed by a sudden gout of flame. In an instant the empty boat was ablaze.

"Paraffin," said the German shortly.

Four men came splashing through the shadows and crawled up the grassy bank beneath. We went down at once to see what we could do for them. They sat there, two of them with nasty wounds on their heads, very much out of breath, glaring ragefully at the roaring mass of flames destroying their boat. The German spoke to them in their own tongue, and then turned to me.

"They are all safe, sir," he said. "All the crew have got ashore. No one has been killed."

None of the Jews could speak English, and when I saw that I could be of no help to them, I went in. A few minutes later the Palestine Police arrived, but I stayed in my room, I had no wish to be detained as a

witness, and the German servant could tell the police all that they wanted to know.

After that Galilee grew distasteful to me, and in the morning, learning that the American lady, with her husband, son and daughter-in-law, had a car in which they were driving to Jerusalem, I went with them, as they had made arrangements to join a convoy in Nazareth.

We halted for a few minutes at Kefr Kenna, traditionally the site of Cana of Galilee, the place of the marriage feast where the water was turned into wine. It is a small village about four miles east of Nazareth, and has two churches, one Greek and one Roman, each, of course, claiming to be standing over the site of the house in which the wedding took place. We were not only offered a choice of locations, but also a diversity of what purported to be the original water-pots of stone. When I learned that there was an equally ancient tradition which placed the scene of the feast at another Cana, at Khirbet Kana, about eight miles to the north, what little vestige of interest I might have had disappeared at once, for even the fact that Cana was the hometown of Nathaniel, another of the Twelve Apostles, failed to rouse my imagination.

I just couldn't feel any interest in Nathaniel, although John i, 45, makes him to be one of the first followers of the Master, and he is identified as Bartholomew—he may have been, for Levi became Matthew, and there's no reason why Nathaniel should not be Bartholomew, more, probably, for he may have been Nathaniel Bar Tolamai, the Son of Tolomai. His martyrdom was painful enough in any case, for he is

said to have been first flayed alive and then crucified. Poor Nathaniel Bartholomew; let us hope that he was a little different from the modern men of Cana, for they are a sorry enough crowd of hangdogs. Maybe that was because a girl was accidentally shot dead in the village by a British soldier during a recent raid—and they did not feel very friendly towards English-speaking visitors.

As we reached the crest of the hill which runs down into Nazareth, we saw a large village down on the plain below. That is Sepphoris, to-day called Seffuriyeh, supposed to be the hometown of Marymother, though that is merely a legend which may, or may not, be true. If it was she must have been a very distressed girl during the Master's infancy, for in A.D. 3, Sepphoris was totally destroyed by the Roman Varus, and its inhabitants were sold into slavery. Herod Antipas rebuilt the town in the following year and made it into the capital of Galilee.

Poor little Mother-Maid, if tradition is correct, she was only fourteen on that night in Bethlehem, so that as a child she had the agony of having her girlhood's home destroyed by foreign soldiery. Many a Palestinian maiden in these days of ours has seen her home go hurtling skywards, blotted out by the blast of the explosives planted by British Royal Engineers, foreigners as much as were those legionaries of Ancient Rome.

I parted from my American friends in Nazareth. When we reached the centre of the town, at the foot of the street running to the Roman church of the Annunciation, we found the Jerusalem convoy already



formed up. As the officer in charge insisted upon starting at once, my friends decided to cut Nazareth out of their schedule and to carry straight on. I wanted to spend at least a day in the town, and so bade them farewell. I had a letter to the Franciscan Superior, so that I knew I could obtain hospitality with them.

Nazareth is a strange little town—it is both a squalid Eastern village, and a fine town of Southern European type. There are great and imposing buildings, cheek-by-jowl with tiny hovels of unimaginable squalor.

I dumped my bag in the Franciscan Hospice, and then found myself free to look around. I was disgusted. I found two churches of the Annunciation, two places where the Archangel is said to have appeared to the Peasant Maid and to have won her consent to be the mother of Him who was to come.

Cana of Galilee had prepared me for something of this sort. I had read a deal about the squabbles between the differing sects of Christians. I went into some caverns beneath the Church of the Annunciation, which is now part of what must be one of the largest buildings in the Holy Land, the brand-new Franciscan Friary. I was shown what was supposed to be the kitchen used by the Holy Family, and, at the farther end of the great house, another cavern that was said to be the carpenter's shop of Joseph, where the Master learned his trade and grew to manhood.

Then, down near Mary's Well, which was about the only site that no one seems to doubt, I saw another church where the Annunciation was said to have taken place. There were also two separate churches of Mary's

Agony, where she was supposed to have followed the mob of angry townsmen who dragged her Son out of the village to cast him headlong over the precipice. I was even shown two precipices, one in the town, the other a bold cliff overlooking the Plain of Armageddon.

The one in the town would certainly not have killed anyone thrown from it, unless he was cast in such a way that he landed on his head, and even then I doubted if the victim would, unless he had the worst of luck, sustain more than a headache. The other, about a mile or so distant, to the south, was a fearsome place of sheer grey rocks, and looked a far more efficient spot for such an execution.

It did not take me long to become thoroughly weary of the people who have charge of the various shrines. I got rid of the Nazareth lad who was acting as my guide, after I had listened to a long story from him of how the new partition scheme would ruin the town if it was kept as a British Mandate in the midst of Jewish and Arab neighbours. He seemed afraid that the frontiers would be closed, and that Nazareth would be smothered to death.

Nazareth was quite a prosperous place in the days before the Great War, before the Syrian province was split up into Palestine, Transjordan, Lebanon, Syria, Alaouites, and all the rest of the new-fangled countries, each about the size of a postage-stamp, which were set up after the Peace Treaties. Under the present Mandate Nazareth has slid down the hill, until now there is practically no trade left, but, if it is to be segregated from all its neighbouring countryside, then the city

will become nothing more than a museum, or, at best, a few houses round the many churches.

I climbed to the top of the hill, where there is a large and most kindly and efficient orphanage belonging to the Salesians, a Roman Catholic brotherhood. A red-tiled church stands right on the crest, and, at the invitation of the Father Superior, I climbed to the belfry. I was alone, and thankful to be, even more grateful that this clean and spacious building did not claim to be on the site of some shrine connected with the Master's boyhood or early manhood, though He must have often climbed to this commanding position.

Looking down on Nazareth it reminded me of a huge saucer set down in the summit of the hills, with the town clinging to a small segment, about a fifth of the whole, of the vessel's side, stretching from rim to flattened bottom. I tried to forget all the places which had been shown to me, and to recall that in this tiny saucer, shut in by the surrounding hills, He had spent most of the few years of His life.

Once again I was meeting the homely touch—the human touch that proved His manhood. He had been down on Galilee-side, and had achieved something of a following—His fame was beginning to spread—the Jewish elders in Jerusalem had gone to the trouble of sending representatives to the north, to find out what sort of a man was this young Nazareth rabbi, who was preaching in and around Capernaum. So far as Palestine was concerned, and to an earnest and practising Jew that was the whole world in those far-off days, the Master had already become a personage of note.

Nazareth reacted as might have been expected.



NAZARETH: FROM THE CHURCH OF THE SILESIAN FATHERS

Mount of Precipitation in right background



People who remember Bill Smith before he won his peerage and became Lord Doggesbodeigh, are always jealous and therefore resentful because one of their former associates has hoisted himself by his own bootstraps.

Matthew xiii, 54-58, gives this small-town point of view in the finest language, when describing the visit paid by the Master to His hometown. Listen:

"And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogues, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man wisdom, and these mighty works?

"Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And his brethren James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?

"And His sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?

"And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them: 'A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house.'

"And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief."

Don't you like that last verse? Doesn't it make Him, the Master, all the more understandable? His own townsmen got on his nerves with their superior sniffs and misbelief, their snobbishness—that particularly nasty sort of snobbishness which grows out of knowing that one is far beneath the level of the lad one knew as a boy, and which one tries to hide by assuming an air of contemptuous superiority.

The Master grew weary of His small-town critics, though the Nazareth men went even further in their

vicious jealousy, for they tried to murder him. After he had preached in the Nazareth synagogue, there is an account in Luke iv, 28-30, of what happened.

"And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these words, were filled with wrath,

"And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong.

"But he passing through the midst of them went his way."

I couldn't quite make up my mind how He managed to escape. Looking over the broken hillside between the town and the Mount of Precipitation, it did not look impossible for a man being hustled along by a crowd of self-righteous, angry people to have managed to pass through the midst of them, especially if He had a few well-wishers amongst the crowd—for even in Nazareth there must have been people who were genuinely glad at the fame of the lad they had once known—though they would have kept quiet, having no wish to be insulted, or of being mistaken for toadies of the "local boy makes good" fellow-townsmen.

No wonder He rejected Nazareth. But it is a very human thing for Him to have done; and to me at least—and I am not comforting myself by hunting for what the religious purist might call imperfections in His personality—to me, I repeat, it brought Him all the nearer.

I was accumulating closer points of contact with this figure which had been so dim and shadowy that it meant naught to me until last winter. The Master was becoming human to me; and, because of that, I was

gradually coming to the stage where I should be able to read and understand what He had taught—even if the records of His teaching have suffered from the enthusiasm and errors of scribes and transcribers during the long centuries.

Matthew—Mr. Penny of the Bible; Mary of Magdala, with her old-maidishness, her red elbows, tightly-skimped hair ending in a bun, for ever busy in keeping His clothes in repair and seeing to His meals; the boasting, vaunting Sons of Thunder, the nickname so tenderly, so humorously and so aptly given to the young brawlers by the gentle-spoken Master; and now Nazareth, with the fact recorded that He became more than a little “fed-up” with the fustiness and petty meannesses of the townsmen. Surely I was getting nearer to a dim understanding of what sort of a man He had been. My trip to Palestine was proving quite well worth while, despite all its discomforts and its obvious risks.

The view was superb from that belfry window. To the west lay the whole sweep of the Bay of Acre, from Carmel to the Ladder of Tyre, with the great new port of Haifa a huge yellowish blotch on the seaward northern slopes of the mountain. I could see how easily it had been defended during the crisis months of 1935 and 1936, when, at the time of the trouble over Italy's war with Abyssinia, it seemed that Britain would be drawn into war with Mussolini, latest and greatest, noblest and most far-seeing of the Cæsars.

At Haifa, I had been shown the emplacements of the batteries which had been prepared on the holy mountain. Big guns had been brought from Gibraltar and



mounted to repel a raid by Italian surface ships, whilst high-angle batteries studded the place to deal with any flying war-craft of New Rome that might have come hurtling through the skies to destroy the pipeline and oil-installation in the bend of the bay.

I had a dim remembrance of hearing a pacifist preacher at home, a couple of years ago, who had tried to interest Dorset folks in some protest his organization was making about Japan fortifying some of her mandated islands in the Pacific, a place called Yap, so far as I could recall. Palestine was a mandate, too, and we had certainly spent a lot of money in fortifying Haifa during those months of crisis. We have a saying down in the West Country which goes, "Doan't 'ee do as I do, but do as I do tell 'ee to." It seems to describe Britain's way of doing things to a hand's-breadth.

Southwards I was looking straight across the levels of Armageddon, studded with Jewish farms and colonies. The green dome of Mount Tabor jutted over the rim of hills running from the Place of Precipitation; through my glasses I could see the ruins of a city wall running round its summit, as well as the high beautiful building of the Franciscan church erected in recent years on ancient foundations above the legendary site of the Transfiguration.

It did not interest me. I do not know quite what to make of the Transfiguration. I half believe that it was just one of those incidents with which every chronicler of the life of some ancient Religion-founder loves to embellish his tale. Yet there may be nothing but sober truth in it, for otherwise why should Luke in

ix, 33, trouble to record what, at best, seems to be a half-witted remark by Peter?

Yet I doubt if the Transfiguration could have taken place on Tabor, for, in the Master's day, there seems to have been a city on the rounded crest, which was fortified by Josephus thirty-odd years after the Crucifixion. It is hardly likely that He would have chosen a place in the centre of a township for the scene.

I hope that the scene of whatever did happen on that occasion, different as it may have been from the recorded event, took place on the Horns of Hattin. It might have done so, as the Master was then in the neighbourhood of the Sea of Galilee.

The Transfiguration is not one of the incidents which seem to have any importance to me, it is the essential Man whom I hope to find, and this extraneous display of Heavenly glory seems quite out of tone with everything else in the unassuming life of the Teacher of Nazareth.

Some day, perhaps, when I am older, when I have experienced more of joy and suffering, and have more knowledge of this thing we call life, I may be able to understand what the Transfiguration means. At present I am trying to establish some contact with the personality of the Master, and I dare not, as yet in any case, bring myself to worry about supernatural matters such as His reputed birth, His recorded miracles, and this Transfiguration business. I had not yet come to the Resurrection; I was reserving my ideas on that until I reached Jerusalem.

Nain and Endor lay on the slopes of Little Hermon, and far away, on the farther side of the Plain, were the

Samaritan Hills with the town of Jenin at their feet. The position of that town was clearly marked, for I could see a continual blinking and shining down there in the distance. A party of British soldiers in Jenin were using a heliograph to signal to some khaki-clad men on the flat land close to the base of my tower, and I was within the area from which the mirror-flash was visible.

I looked down once again on Nazareth—and forgot all about the monks and priests who squabble their lives away. I was sorry for them—and that is the height of conceit, for every one of them was a wiser and more intelligent man than I am—yet I was truly sorry for them. What on earth does it matter which specified piece of soil and limestone covered the exact spot upon which that ancient family—old Joseph, Mary mother, her five boys and her troop of daughters—moved and had their being.

A strange thing, but I had not realized that the Master had had a swarm of brothers and sisters until I read that account of the events in Nazareth and the visit they paid to Capernaum, James and Joses and Simon and Judas and the sisters.

I think that James must have been his favourite; at least his after-life, when he became the first Patriarch of the Christians, showed that he loved and honoured Joshua—for that I take it was the original form of Jesus—as a great and noble Leader, or at least, as the Founder of a new sect in Jewry. But what about Joses and Simon and Judas?

The answer was simple enough. They considered him a dangerous nuisance—a stubborn half-wit, in-



THE BALFOUR FOREST, WITH THE JEWISH AGRICULTURAL SETTLEMENT,  
GINEGAR, IN THE DISTANCE

This was originally barren, desolate ground



flated with conceit, who was likely to bring the stern and jealous hand of the Roman power down upon the household. Read John vii, 1-10, and you will appreciate the heartbreak He must have endured at the hands of His brothers. It will also show how His neighbours regarded Him, if you care to read the whole of that seventh chapter.

Verse 1 says that the Jews lay in wait to murder Him if He dared to enter Judea, and yet His blood brothers told Him to go there, and I can hear the sneers in their voices as they sarcastically told Him to go and exhibit His stunts in Judea.

He showed His essential Manhood in His reply to them, even allowing His natural resentment to glimpse through His mild answer. He took care, too, as verse 9 points out, to remain prudently in Galilee until His disdainful brethren had started for Jerusalem. He hoped that the spies would see that He was not with His family, and so believe that He had remained at home.

If you wish to see what His countrymen thought of Him, read verse 12, but even those who considered Him a cheat, would not help the Jews to find a fellow-Galilean. John, seventh chapter, is one of the most human in all the Bible; try it, and realize some of the heartbreaks and disappointments to which He was exposed.

I read the Epistle of James as I stood there in the tower—read it as I would any letter—and, frankly I was puzzled. It did not look like a letter written by a man whose whole life was controlled by the memory of a loved and honoured elder brother. I was glad,

later on, when I read that it is ascribed to someone who lived long after the death of James, whom you will remember was slain by the rebel Jews just before the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans. Perhaps, after all, they were only half-brothers, sons of Joseph by an earlier marriage, as those insist who would die in the last ditch to defend the utterly unimportant matter of Marymother's continued virginity. I hoped so, for the sake of the peace of mind of the Master whilst He was a Man. It only needed a few more touches for me to complete my picture of Him. What had I got already—and without having seriously considered any word of His teaching (that I hope to do later)?

Firstly: A magnetic personality. He needed that to have drawn hard-case fishermen from their nets, or to call our Mr. Penny from his nice comfortable job in the Inland Revenue.

Secondly: A figure as romantic and appealing as, say, that of Bonnie Prince Charlie; otherwise those youthful enthusiasts, the Sons of Thunder, would not have sacrificed all in His cause. Even that hard-headed scoundrel Judas Iscariot, bears this out, for he weighed his chances and must have believed that he stood a good chance of being Chancellor of the Exchequer in the New Empire which he believed this young leader was to form.

Thirdly: A lively, kindly humour, and an intense and kindly sense of the ridiculous—witness the name he gave to the sons of Zebedee. An intense desire to help the sick and suffering. A burning enthusiasm to alter the vile social conditions He saw around Him. He had His troubles; squabbles with His own relatives, and

His disappointment in the manner in which He was received by the people amongst whom He had grown to manhood.

He had a sovereign contempt for money, I suppose that He would be called feckless by our modern counter-jumping minds, but He was lucky in having competent women like Mary of Magdala and Mrs. Chuza to watch over His needs and to make ends meet. I wonder if Mary ever really believed in His maxims not to take thought for the morrow? I suspect that she was for ever febrilely wrangling with Judas Iscariot to make sure that there was enough silver to buy flour and meat, vegetables and salt, as well as a little extra to lay by for new sandals and garments as the old ones wore out.

I wonder if any of those unnamed sisters of His were in sympathy with Him? Did they give Mary of Magdala a few yards of woollen or linen material occasionally, with which she could fashion new clothes for Him? I am sure that Marymother did, though that poor lady must have been very harassed by Joses and Simon and Judas, as witness that visit to Capernaum. I don't think that she went willingly to the lakeside town, to bother her beloved eldest Son when He was at his busiest.

I wonder if the Master was as rude to them as reports make Him? Probably—He may have had to endure so much haranguing from these three brothers whilst he was in Nazareth, that, when He was told that they were outside waiting to see Him, He may have decided that He could not stand any more of their arrogant demands for Him to come back to the



carpenter's bench in Nazareth and to "quit making a public display of Himself". Relatives are often so arrogantly impertinent, ties of blood seem to be made an excuse for any, and every, rudeness. We have all suffered from relatives and their impudent demands to rule our lives for us.

It looks as though I were trying to debase the personality of the Master by imputing these very human weaknesses to Him. I am not, but I *am* trying desperately hard to understand Him, to fix Him in my mind as a real historical personage who actually lived, and to get away from the stained-glass, emasculated, blond-bearded youth who means nothing to me.

What did Marymother think of His band of women followers? She probably looked at them dubiously at first—but she paid them the compliment of joining them, for she was amongst them when the time came to stand on Calvary on that dreadful Friday afternoon. Let us suppose, for pity's sake, that some of His sisters were there also.

Aye—all honour to Marymother, let all our sympathy and all our respect go out to her. She withstood the nagging arguments of the other three boys, and she followed her eldest son—the Master—even to His shameful ending. The whole drama of the Holy Family can be so easily followed if we read between the lines. Dying in agony, He realized the unworthiness of those other brothers of his, for it was to the stranger, to the younger of the two Sons of Thunder, he committed the care of His beloved mother, even though there were those other children.

Why on earth don't our religious teachers and

clergymen teach us this human, understandable sort of thing when we are young? Why not strip away all the nonsense and claptrap with which they have surrounded the gentle, human Figure of the Master. Even if He was God—and, as I have said so often, that is a matter upon which I have no opinions either for or against—it would make God Incarnate all the more beloved if these family difficulties of His were displayed as a consolation to all of us, for there is no one who does not have to suffer from that plague of households—relatives who use their blood-tie as an excuse for impertinence.

I believed that I had extracted all that my mind could assimilate for the present from Nazareth. I had found a new meaning of human relationship in the beloved figure of the Master. He was coming down out that stained-glass window of His—He was taking on the form and shape of manhood. Soon, I felt, I should be in a fit state to commence the reading of what He had had to say.

There was a car starting for Jerusalem the next day, and I took a seat in it as far as Nablus. I was warned to go on, not to make a stop in that turbulent town, where all Europeans are hated, but, hearing that there was a monastery there, I determined to stop, and to seek their hospitality, as the local hotel was hardly likely to welcome me for fear of disturbances.

It may be strange the way in which I stuck to Roman Catholic pilgrim hospices, but once again I can assure everyone that never for a moment did the good monks and friars ever take advantage of their position as hosts to try making a convert of me. They allowed

their lives and works to speak for themselves—and that has roused another problem for me. Monks are a new class to me, these men who have resigned everything to serve God in what they believe to be the best of all ways. I recognize that many of them are men of the highest literary and intellectual attainments—far wiser than I can ever be—and, if they are willing to give up all the comforts and joys of ordinary life to follow the Master; if they have such a burning faith in His Godhead, in His Mission; if they hold Him to be the very Son of God and therefore God Himself, how can a man of ordinary elementary intelligence like myself continue to have doubts?

I respect monks and I admire them, and I would give much to be able to subordinate my own judgment to a central authority as they have done, but the fact remains that I cannot. Maybe it is because I do not yet know enough; later on I may be wiser and follow in their footsteps—Peace lies in that direction—but I know that I shall not, I must make up my mind for myself.

Therefore I will go ahead in my own fashion, trying to understand; listening quietly and respectfully to anyone who can speak clearly and sensibly to me on this subject. I will always be ready to be convinced; I will place no difficulties in the way of being persuaded, but I must be absolutely sure of the arguments advanced; they must bear out what little we humans have discovered in the ways of the spiritual, of things historical, and be logical, and of commonsense.

Maybe I am too fleshly and grossly material ever to be convinced. There may be something in this talk of

“ the gift of Faith ”. I haven't got it—at least not yet ~~—~~but if I can only be shown good cause why I should accept all that is conventionally taught, I shall be a happy man.

I will not be happy, though, if I yield to a sentimental wish to believe, and do violence to myself by forcing a subordination to an authority which I do not fully recognize. That way lies the hypocrisy of face-saving under which most of us, and myself included, suffer—the sort of Faith which is kept only for Sundays, best-clothes, roast beef and potatoes, and giving money to charities to let neighbours see your name on the top of the list.

I left Nazareth in the morning, under the escort of a police armoured-car, and a couple of lorries of soldiers. There were eleven passenger cars in the convoy, and they were not all driven by Jews; there were several Arabs amongst them for one and all feared the brigands thronging the hills.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

I WAS lucky enough to have two Europeans as my fellow-passengers in the big Buick car which carried me south from Nazareth. The driver was a Jew, a bronzed young fellow who spoke good English. One of my companions was a Nonconformist clergyman who had spent nearly a year in the Holy Land, studying the places of the Bible; the other was a German who seemed to be some sort of commercial traveller for a large firm in Northern Germany. He, also, spoke excellent English.

We were the leading vehicle, following immediately behind the escorting armoured-car, a small affair, manned by three British policemen. It had an armoured hood to protect the driver, and sides of sheet steel which gave cover to any men sitting inside. Altogether it looked rather like a small metal water-tank, except for the machine-gun which projected over the top.

We dropped down the sweeping curves of the mountain road beneath the Place of Precipitation, and in a few moments were on a long straight stretch of asphalted road, sloping gently towards the centre of Armageddon and lined with Jewish farms and villages.

I was struck by the modern methods of agriculture used by the Jewish settlers. There was everything there of which I had read in English and American



AFULEH, THE CENTRAL JEWISH COLONY ON THE PLAIN OF ARMAGEDDON



farmers' papers; tractors, cultivators, quintuple-ploughs, rollers, drills, harrows, anything and everything to make farming as efficient as possible. Trees had been planted for wind-breaks and for beauty; the houses were clean and efficiently designed; the farm buildings would have been a model to any country in the world. The farm workers looked serious, hard-working people, intensely busy with their job. There was nothing amateurish about them—a farmer is not mistaken in his judgment of agricultural folk—it was obvious that these Jews were straining every nerve to make a success of their life-task.

We crossed the metre-gauge of the Hedjaz Railway at a large Jewish village called Afuleh, where there is a junction with the line running south through the hills of Samaria to Nablus. The Jewish driver, whose name was Reuben Something-or-other, told me that in 1924 there was scarcely a sign of cultivation on the whole expanse of Armageddon. All these farms and fertile fields had been established in the past fourteen years. It was almost incredible, for the area looked like one of those settled districts which have had generations of careful and loving tending.

One sinister fact showed its ugly snout everywhere, these smiling farms were like those of the American border a century ago. Everyone had its strong point, made of sandbags, barbed wire and concrete, loop-holed and pierced for rifle-fire. I saw tall look-out towers, and at least one searchlight platform, ready to deal with night attacks, whilst the barbed-wire fences near the home pastures were much stronger than those needed to control cattle. Some had expensive apron-



fences, the kind of thing you see at military fortresses.

One familiar feature, the same as that which has defaced West Dorset, went striding across the smiling face of Armageddon—tall lattice-work electric-power pylons. I asked the driver why the Arabs had not farmed this fertile land. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Too lazy, I guess," he replied. "They grew only just enough barley for their own needs. The rest lay fallow."

"What happened to the Arab farmers when you Jews settled here?" I inquired.

"They were all hill-farmers," he answered. "They had land nearer their own villages, more than sufficient for their needs. Before we came they cultivated very small sections of the plain, as it was easier to work than their hill-fields, but they never cared for it, as they lost so many through malaria and other fevers. It was easier than working their own land, however, and so they did a little down here. Now they have to farm the fields nearer their own villages."

"You mean that the coming of the Jews caused no hardship to the Arabs?" I went on.

"A dozen commissions and inquiries made by your own British Government have established that to be a fact," he said.

"Do you lose a lot of people through malaria and other insect-borne diseases?"

"We did at first," he replied. "Scores of the Haluzim, as we call the pioneers, died at their work whilst they drained the marshes fed by the River Kishon and other streams, but nowadays the plain is almost clear of malaria and blackwater fever. It has done



A SECTION OF ONE OF THE FORTIFIED POINTS OF  
A NEWLY ESTABLISHED JEWISH SETTLEMENT

Note the loopholes in the wall



the few Arabs a lot of good too. Look, there is Zeirin village," he pointed to a collection of mud-hovels and stone ruins standing on a swell of ground to the left, surrounded by cactus hedges. "A few years ago it had a terrific death-rate, and every person in it was rotten with fever. Now it is one of the healthiest and most prosperous Arab villages in all Palestine."

"Zeirin was once Jezreel," broke in the clergyman. "It is hardly possible to think of that collection of huts as the capital of Jezebel and Ahab, is it?"

It certainly wasn't.

"There are some queer survivals in the place-names of Palestine," went on the clergyman. "Place-names which you won't find in the guide-books, but those by which the locals still call their hills and valleys. Do you see that low hillock to the right of the cactus hedges?"

I saw a long low mound, of no particular prominence.

"The people of Jezreel call it 'Tel ul Rissas ul Beni Melukh'," he said, and paused impressively.

I looked at him, wondering what on earth he was driving at.

"Sorry," he said with a chuckle. "I forgot you wouldn't understand. It means the 'Mound of the heads of the sons of the king'." He looked at me, as though he expected me to see what he meant. Then, in disgust, he drew a pocket-size Old Testament out of his pocket.

"Read 2nd Kings x, verses 6 to 10," he said in deep disgust at my ignorance.

I read:

"Then he (Jehu) wrote a letter the second time to

them, saying, If ye be mine, and if ye will hearken unto my voice, take ye the heads of the men your master's sons, and come to me to Jezreel by to-morrow this time. Now the king's sons, being seventy persons, were with the great men of the city, which brought them up.

"And it came to pass, when the letter came to them, that they took the king's sons, and slew seventy persons, and put their heads in baskets, and sent him them to Jezreel.

"And there came a messenger, and told him, saying, They have brought the heads of the king's sons. And he said, Lay ye them in two heaps at the entering in of the gate until the morning."

Jehu had had the insufferable impudence to have gone out and claimed himself to be God's instrument in exterminating Ahab's House, to be fulfilling Elijah's prophecy.

To the smug little priest-scribe who wrote the account it seemed to be the final chapter of that day on Carmel. Elijah was dead, or gone, but even out of this world he had triumphed over that dominant, regal, luckless earlier edition of Maria Theresa—Queen Jezebel. She had come to a nasty end, though she must have carried a very brave soul. When she knew that her death was upon her she went, to all the trouble of putting on a brave show. She made up her face, set her permanent wave, and had the spirit to taunt her conqueror to his face as he rode into Jezreel in triumph. If a Heaven exists, then there ought to be a separate palace amongst the many mansions for queens who have died valiantly. If so, alongside Mary

of Scotland, Zenobia and Cleopatra, it is sure that Jezebel holds her proud place.

How the scribe who wrote down that part of the Book of Kings hated Ahab and his lady wife! He even glorifies the awful story where Jehu plays the part of Sir Walter Tyrrel to Joram, son of Jezebel's, William Rufus. Poor Jezebel! Her gallant husband killed in action; her son slain by treachery; she could yet use her lipstick and eyebrow-pencil to make a regal showing before she took the station at the window, where she knew death waited for her. May the good God, Who loves courage, grant her eternal rest!

I passed back the Testament to the clergyman.

"I spent some weeks in Jezreel," he said, "and that mound covers the site of the ancient gate of the place when it was a walled city. If you ask the men of Zeirin why they call the mound by that name, they can't tell you, any more than a Cockney can give you the meaning of the name London. They know nothing about Ahab or Jezebel or Jehu. I think that this place-name, surviving through the centuries is some proof of the truth of the ancient Record, don't you?"

I agreed.

"There are others," he went on. Pointing to the distant Monastery of the Sacrifice he told me what I already knew, that its native name is El Makhkraka, "The Place of Burning". He mentioned the knoll on the steep bank of the Kishon which I had seen, "The Mound of the Priests".

"When we pass by the foot of the hill of Samaria," he said, "I will show you a mound on the sky rim, an artificial mound, which the shepherds call 'Tel Ibn

Haddad'. In Arabic that means 'The Mound of the Blacksmith's Son', but, if you visited it, you would find that it is the very best place for a general in command of a siege of Samaria to have the finest possible view of all sectors of his lines; where he would be able to see what the besieged were doing inside the walls. I believe that it should be 'Tel Ben Haddad'. Look at 1st Kings xx, and 2nd Kings vi and vii, you will see that Ben Haddad, King of Assyria, besieged it twice, and I am certain that that little mound was made by his engineers to form a level space on which to pitch his tent, and to direct the siege operations."

I was impressed, and said so. By this time we were running out of the Jewish-farmed area, and there was nothing but hundreds of acres of untilled land around us. The land was gorgeous with its mantle of spring vegetation, covered with wild flowers in a flowing carpet, but left utterly untilled by man.

"There, that proves my argument," said the driver triumphantly. "This portion of the plain is as good as the part which we farm. Have the Arabs bothered even to plough it? When I first came here from France as a boy, all the Emek Israel was like this."

"What do you mean by Emek Israel?" I asked.

He laughed. "That is our name for Armageddon," he replied. "The Arabs call it Merj ibn Amer, you British call it the Plain of Jezreel and half a dozen other names."

Far over to the left, towards the Jordan, beneath the feet of bare-topped Gilboa, I could see the red roofs of other Jewish colonies, and was told that they lay close to the springs of En Harod, where Gideon

chose his "forlorn hope". Thence they stretched down to Beisan, the ancient Bethshean, where the bodies of Saul and his sons were exposed to insult after the battle against the Philistines on the summit of the mountain.

"David cursed the crown of Gilboa," said the clergyman. "Read 2nd Samuel i, 21, then look and see if, even at this season of fertility, there is any sign of vegetation upon those barren rocks."

Gilboa is certainly barren, but I did not hurt the good man's feelings by saying that there was no proof that it had not been barren long before the priestly scribe had written the words he imputed to David. It may have been a well-known natural phenomenon which the good writer enthusiastically employed to point his moral. Still, the fact that it had been noted was another striking instance of the minute accuracy of the historical geography of the Book.

The German commercial traveller grunted some remarks that he would never have believed that Jews could have turned out so well as farmers—and went on to voice his satisfaction that a wise Fuehrer had expelled them from the Fatherland before they fixed their tentacles on the good German earth. The driver looked his hatred, and an uncomfortable silence fell—a silence that held supreme until we had run through the dusty little town of Jenin and entered the hills.

I noted one significant thing. The British Police crew of the armoured-car had been standing up, smoking and chatting together as we sped across the plain. I now saw one of them come close to the firing mechanism of his machine-gun, and that he had



donned his steel helmet—the others were safely down behind the armour. We had entered the district which they call the Triangle of Terror, where the writ of the Government runs limpingly—that part of Palestine enclosed by a line drawn from Jenin to Nablus, thence on to Tulkarm on the coastal plain, and so back to Jenin.

We passed an occasional sandbagged, barbed-wire, corrugated-iron outpost, a-bristle with rifles and machine-guns, manned by steel-helmeted soldiers, but saw nothing of rebels or brigands.

The clergyman pointed out a steep little mound which he said was Dothan, the place where Joseph was sold by his brethren to the Bedouin slave-dealers, and where Elisha the Prophet had his successful little argument with the catch-polls sent out to arrest him by the King of Syria.

The good parson told me the ancient names of the hilltop villages we were passing, but I took no particular interest in them, though I suppose they were all very important. I can remember his snort of disgust at my lack of comprehension when he pointed out Jeba, because it is the site of Geba which is mentioned in the Book of Judith, which he knew was found only in the Roman Canon. I gathered, from his expression, that Geba was really not of particular interest because, for some strange reason, which I could not fathom, it reeked of Popery. A queer thing is prejudice based on sectarian bigotry.

Then we swept over a mountain crest; and down below, in a saucer-like valley, stood a detached hill, crowned by mounds, ruins and olive trees. Once again



BETH ALPIA AND THE VALLEY OF JEZREEL, FROM MT. GILBOA

Close to Gideon's Spring and Jezreel



my kindly informant waxed enthusiastic, bobbing and straining to keep the hill in view as our continual winding down a series of hairpin bends brought it now ahead, and now astern.

As we passed I saw, on the barren hillside, the remains of two round towers, and, high up, a row of drunken-looking columns, with a heap of rubble on the summit. I made up my mind, then and there, that, no matter how dangerous it might be, I would come back and look over the ruins of Imperial Samaria.

We ran past a signboard at a cross-roads, and I read, in the English section of the three-language signboard, that the other road ran down to Tulkarm and the coastal plain. Palestine now has three official languages—if Pilate was writing his superscription to-day he would do so in English, Hebrew and Arabic. One of the languages of Calvary's condemnation still holds sway.

For about four miles we ran along a road which ran through the narrow pass between the two high mountains of Ebal and Gerizim, and then, after driving over a level-crossing, we pulled up in front of the Governorate buildings in the city of Nablus, over the sites where once stood Shechem and Sychar.

The driver and my companions all joined in expressing doubts of my sanity when I grabbed my battered suitcase and said that I was alighting here. The clergyman even asked me if I would like him to write to Janet when my murder was reported.

I was more than a little tempted to go on with them. The driver was even kind enough to say that if I was short of money he would take me on to Jerusalem for

nothing. Good fellow—his generosity touched me, and I gave him a tip of a pound-note. Yet I was quite determined to see this strange town for myself. Hemmed in between its high mountains it enthralled me. I have always had a firm belief that I shall not die one second before my time—that Someone, long ago, decreed the time and place, the manner and the kind of my ending, and that nothing that I can do will alter that decision by one second.

That is not religion—maybe it is superstition. Whatever it is, I don't know, and I certainly don't care. I believe it to be true right down to my heels, and it is a little thing which has always guided me.

A small ragged Arab boy ran up and grabbed my suitcase. Thanking my companions, I trudged away in his wake, past the barbed wire of the long one-storied building of the Governorate, crossed the railway line again, and went down the road towards a building about two hundred yards away which was pointed out to me as the monastery.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A KNOT of blue-clad policemen, some in peaked caps to show that they were British, others in mock-astrakhan bonnets who were Arabs, looked at me as though I was mad. A European, a-foot, unarmed, and civilian, making his way down towards the opening of the Nablus bazaars! I think they looked upon me as some penniless "stunt-merchant", for my flannel trousers and tweed jacket, topped by a felt hat certainly did not give me a millionaire's appearance.

I stopped at a small doorway in a high wall beside a deep archway spanning the street, and rang the bell. A monk opened the door and politely asked me in English what my business might be. I presented my letter of introduction, and he immediately admitted me, taking my suitcase from the Arab boy.

I was taken into a parlour—the usual monastic parlour which I had grown accustomed to expect—all polished linoleum, dusted oak and a strong smell of furniture-polish, and in a few minutes a Friar came in, a man who spoke with an American accent. He bade me welcome, though he impressed upon me the rashness of wandering alone in the streets of Nablus—I was only laying myself open to insult, if to no worse. I replied that I was as timid as the next man, but that I did wish to see whatever I could, and so had

stopped in this town built in the narrow valley where Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the first Kings of Israel had lived.

He sighed, but said that he could quite understand my meaning. He knew an Arab notable and thought that perhaps a word passed to him might ease my passage. He was good enough to send this word, and I later met the notable on the terrace-garden of the only sizeable hotel in Nablus.

He was full of grievances, and if all that he said was true I must say that he had plenty to grouse about. The Palestine Police certainly seem to keep a tight grip upon Nablus, probably all the tighter because they so nearly lost all control of this part of Palestine during the middle months of 1937. He produced some cuttings from the English *Times*, which he had pasted side by side on a piece of cardboard. I will give them as I read them. They were under various dates.

The first was 24th November, 1937, and ran:

"The first trial under the new Defence Regulations was held this morning at Haifa, when the Military Court, presided over by Major Fawkes, found Sheikh Farhan es Sadi guilty on the charge of illegally carrying firearms and condemned him to death by hanging. From the evidence of two witnesses, it appears that when the sheikh was captured he was in possession of a Mauser pistol and several bandoliers."

The Arab leader looked savage. "The condemned sheikh was over seventy years old," he said. "Your British authorities hanged him right away after sentence. Look at the sort of treatment the Jews get for the same offence as that for which the Arab old man

was slaughtered." He produced another cutting, dated 21st January, 1938.

"Two young Jews were sentenced by the Jerusalem Military Court to-day to five years' imprisonment for the possession of firearms. The offence was discovered through one of the accused accidentally discharging his revolver in a dance-hall. These are the first sentences passed by a Military Court on Jews."

There were two more cuttings on the cardboard. Under date, 25th January, 1938, was:

"Three Arabs were hanged to-day. Two of them had been sentenced by a Civil Court for the murder of a Jew, and one by a Military Court for having carried firearms."

Under the date 30th January, 1938, I read:

"The General Officer commanding the troops in Palestine, Major-Gen. Wavell, has reduced the Jerusalem Military Court sentences on two Jewish youths, Ephraim Brin and Abraham Aziz Jacob for carrying automatic pistols and ammunition, *from five years to six months and three months respectively.*" (Italics are mine.)

"That is your British justice," said the Arab gentleman. "I hope that you are proud of it."

I tried to point out that I knew nothing of the circumstances of each case, and would hesitate to pass any opinion. This seemed to disgust him. He snorted.

"I once learned one of your English proverbs," he said, his voice full of disgust. "You say that there are none so blind as those who refuse to see. If this news is published in *The Times* newspaper all the English must know about it."



I told him that I had not read a copy of *The Times* for years. I reckon that the last time I did so was when I took Janet to London to see a specialist, and *The Times* was the only paper on the table in his waiting-room; but I could not convince him that every voter in England did not pore over the staid columns of the great newspaper every morning. I'd like him to meet John, my ploughman, and to see and hear what he'd have to say about reading *The Times*. John reads the *News of the World* and the *Bridport News*, and doesn't concern himself over anything else—there are millions of Johns in England.

The Nablus notable went on for a long time, giving me a list of the deeds committed by British troops and police; some of them I knew were true, but a lot of them were pure fantastical nonsense; but the situation was bad enough. There was no disputing the statements made by the British Chief Justice of Palestine about the Government's evasion of responsibility in the matter of the blowing-up of the poorest quarter of Arab Jaffa.

Nablus was boiling and seething with hatred, and there was a sinister rip-tide of religious fanaticism poisoning the political detestation; and, from their point of view, I could not blame these Arabs. I tried to put myself in their place, and I knew if we men of Dorset were treated in this fashion by a foreign conqueror, I should be one of the desperate men who would be lying out in the hills, cherishing the despairing hope of having at least one shot at the tyrants before I was killed, or hauled off to die upon the gallows.

I must have pleased my acquaintance for he gave me a note in Arabic, which, he said, would protect me from any violence from the Arabs. He did more, for he took me to see the Hereditary High Priest of the Samaritans, and I found that worthy gentleman the most interesting person I met during the whole of my visit to the Holy Land.

In the first place there was the matter of his family-tree—not that I am a snob to worship a pedigree. After all, they do not amount to a row of beans, for everyone of us must have as long a line of descent as the bluest-blooded descendant of any Norman pick-pocket. But I am a farmer, and I do know the value of breeding, and of keeping a stud book.

This bearded man claimed descent from Uzziel, the youngest son of Kohath, the second son of Levi, who is mentioned in Exodus vi, 18. He was careful to point out that the direct line of High Priests of Israel, in the family of Aaron, had died out in the first half of the Christian seventeenth century, and that the great office had then passed into the family of Levi. Quite a lot of his claims may have been questionable, for I could not see how he got over the difficulties connected with the Assyrian deportations, but, even so, a family-tree which goes back even to that Assyrian conquest of 722 B.C.—nearly twenty-six hundred years ago—should be an object lesson to some of our West-country squires who are so flatulently proud of a first traceable ancestor in some astute wool-stapler of Queen Elizabeth's day.

I was shown the famous Samaritan Pentateuch, one of the oldest if not the oldest, of Biblical manuscripts.

Of course he claimed that it was written by Moses—he probably believed it to be so—but that is hardly tenable with what we know of the authorship of the ancient text. There seems to be little doubt, however, that it is either the original scroll which was carried off by one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Elisahib the High Priest, who was son-in-law to Nehemiah's chief rival, Sanballat the Horonite, who is mentioned in Nehemiah xiii, 28, or else it is an early copy.

A funny thing that; for the ancient Jews returning from the Captivity seemed to have been bitten with the same bug as that which Nazi Germany is now lauding—and in their efforts to ensure a "pure race" the Hebrew reformers were more ruthless than Julius Streicher is to-day.

It is this same son of Joiada who is the Manasseh mentioned by our old friend Josephus the Chronicler, who says definitely that he carried the Pentateuch to Shechem—that is Nablus, and for whom the Temple on Gerizim was built.

The Samaritans follow the Law in the Pentateuch as rigidly as do the orthodox Jews, with the one exception of having their Temple on Gerizim instead of in Jerusalem. Politics stepped in there as they have done with most of our dogmatic versions of Christianity. It is strange, though, that these modern Samaritans have no respect for the prophets of Northern Israel who were their own fellow-subjects, though it is quite understandable why they rejected the later regulations of the Nazi-nationalistic Pharisees.

The High Priest insisted that his people are the only true survivors of the Seed of Israel. The centuries

have worked another miracle it seems—the “pure race” Jews threw them out, now the descendants of men who were rejected regard the modern descendants of these old-time Nazis as of tainted stock. I made an idle reflection, wondering if History would repeat itself, and whether the inhabitants of the ghettos of Frankfurt would, in the dim future, have sons who claim to be the only real Teutons, and who would show their contempt for the progeny of the Storm-Troopers—it would be scarcely more violent a switch.

I was very sorry to learn that I was too early in the year to see the Passover, the annual sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb on Mount Gerizim, which is offered up with all the ancient ritual of Exodus by the High Priest, just as it once was in the Temple of Jerusalem, and is now the last trace of the sacrificial rites of the Old Testament.

I was offered coffee in a tiny cup, and a drink of some sticky-sweet liqueur that had the kick of a mule in its treachery depths, and after listening for an hour or so to the interpreter of the High Priest, I made my farewells. There are scarce two hundred Samaritans left to-day, and their number is for ever shrinking because they will not allow inter-marriage with any lesser breeds. They even forbid unions with the Jews, whom they affect to despise. Soon, within a century at most, the ancient People of Israel, the last hybrid remnants of the Ten Tribes of Israel who revolted and formed their own kingdom, will be naught but a receding memory, and the last fires of sacrifice offered to Jehovah will have been extinguished.

I returned to the monastery for my lunch, and after being congratulated for obtaining a safe-conduct, I hired a guide and a couple of horses, and rode up the steep flank of Gerizim to see the ruins of the ancient Temple of the Samaritans. It was a long and weary climb, and, in mercy to the animal, I had to do most of it on foot, though my Arab guide saw no sense in hiring a mount and then walking himself, and sturdily declined to alight.

There was nothing much to be seen on the towering crest of the mountain, except a heap of tumbled rubble and weathered grey stones. The Temple has been destroyed so many times, and a succession of conquerors, Romans, Byzantines, Crusaders and Saracens, have improvised castles out of the ruins so that the whole plan is lost, and seems, at least to an untrained eye like mine, impossible to reconstitute.

But the view looking down on to the bare, rocky narrow gut between the facing mountains of Ebal and Gerizim, was superb. It was so easy to imagine the ceremony of the Blessing and the Cursing, as I stood there, and my guide assured me that the acoustics of the valley were such that every word could have been heard by the two multitudes. Joshua viii, 33 and 34 has the whole scene described in a few words.

“And all Israel, and their elders, and officers, and their judges, stood on this side the ark and on that side before the priests of the Levites . . . half of them over against Mount Gerizim, and half of them over against Mount Ebal; as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel.

“And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the book of the law.”

The Book of Joshua, perhaps, was written by several men, none of them people who lived in Joshua's day. Probably it was written many centuries after the first invasion of Palestine by the fierce Bedouins of the Hebrew Confederacy, but there is an authentic ring about that incident. It is the sort of thing which must have been handed down from father to son throughout the generations, and, standing there on Gerizim's summit, I had no shadow of doubt that the victorious tribesmen had really held their Victory Thanksgiving on the steep slopes of this deep and narrow valley. I know that that invasion was not the rapid all-conquering march about which we were taught in school; that it was many years before the Hebrews had a firm grip on their new territories; but, somehow, I had a feeling that the first part of the war of conquest had ended there, on these bare slopes, amongst the weathered rocks of the two mountain sides. The story took on a new meaning and a new life for me.

There was nothing living on the wind-swept plateau of Gerizim, naught but grey rocks and tumbled grey ruins, except that out on a spur, a dozen very bored British soldiers were manning a grey-stone rampart round their tents—an outpost placed here to stop Arab rebels from sniping the barracks down below in the valley. This had happened on several occasions during the previous eighteen months, and now there was a post here to prevent any repetition. Gerizim was once more occupied by foreign troops, just as she

had been by Assyrians, Syrians, Babylonians, Egyptians, Romans, Crusaders, Saracens and the Turks who withstood Allenby.

Nablus is a long narrow town, and from the top of the mountain it was easy to see the two mounds which had once been Shechem and Sychar. I am afraid that I could remember very little of their history; only the women of Samaria at Jacob's Well, and the treacherous trick played by Jacob's sons in revenge for the seduction of their sister, Dinah. Why is it, that if we listen to some of the teachers and preachers at home, we have to look upon those same old tricksters as holy men and patterns to be followed? Yet, if we will only read the old Tale as it was meant to be read, as a record of ancient days and ancient ways, and divorce all this superstitious jiggery-pokery from our reading, how enthrallingly interesting and instructive it all becomes.

Another tie with Britain came to stare me in the face. Nablus is the corruption of the word Neapolis, there is no "P" sound in Arabic, thus "Police" becomes "Bolice", and so forth. The ancient city was rebuilt in the first century, and called after Vespasian, "Flavius Neapolis", Flavius was his family name. I found Vespasian bobbing up again, the same Roman who, some years before he deployed his army against the Jewish insurgents in Galilee, led the Second Legion across the stoutly defended eastern ramparts of Eggardum in West Dorset.

I visited one other place in Nablus before I left—Jacob's Well, nearly a mile from the town, at the point where the main Jerusalem road bends round the foot

of Gerizim and enters the plain, though there is another one which the Samaritans claim to be the genuine Well near their synagogue in the depths of the bazaar, close to the Tomb of Joseph.

By the way, whether or not the Tomb is that of the almost legendary figure, Joseph son of Jacob, it certainly is that of some Hebrew who was a great man during the sojourn in Egypt. It is one of the best-authenticated sites in Palestine, for it has a continuous history ever since the days of the Hebrew monarchy. More, it has had better fortune than many other shrines; it has not suffered malicious destruction, for the legendary Joseph is a figure honoured by Jews, Samaritans, Mohammedans and Christians alike.

At the Well I read the account of that meeting between the Master and the Samaritan woman. No wonder the poor lady was puzzled when He began to speak to her of the Living Water. I wonder what Janet would do if some passer-by started to talk to her like that after she had drawn him a glass of water from our pump? I somehow don't think that she would have been so polite as the Samaritan woman was to Him.

The Samaritan woman, though, does not seem to have drawn much permanent benefit from her encounter; she evidently looked upon Him as we would on some fortune-teller who had made a good guess at murky facts in our past, and that was all. And yet it is a very human picture we get of Him, sitting there talking to the stranger woman, asking for a drink, and engaging her in conversation. I am sure, though, that some of the words which are put into His mouth were



never uttered by Him at all, especially that little bit where He claims to be the Messiah. After all, John was written a great many years after the events it records, and there is nothing more likely than that the chronicler's memory was at fault, or that some later hand has placed in His mouth words which were thought fit for Him to have said. In any case, who heard the conversation? I do not think that He would have flung the accusation of immorality at the poor woman in the presence of witnesses; and, women being what they are, I do not suppose that she boasted about it. I cannot imagine the Master recounting the tale of what had happened between them; it would smack rather too much of patting Himself on the back.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

TRUSTING in my Arabic safe-conduct, I hired a car the next morning from the rank which stands between the monastery and the hotel, and drove to Samaria, five or six miles away. We turned off the main road just above the cross-roads running down to Tulkarm and the Plain of Sharon, and went up a bumpy track, very steep in places, until we reached a miserable village of stone hovels called Sebastieh, huddled on the eastern side of the huge mound of rubble which covers Imperial Sebaste, as Herod the Great re-named Samaria.

There was plenty to see, for archæologists and excavators have been very busy. Quite a lot of the ancient city still remains above ground level, in particular what must once have been a magnificent street of columns leading up to the highest point of the hill, where Ahab's Ivory Palace was discovered a few years ago.

Compared to Jerusalem or Damascus, Samaria is a mere fledgling, for it was founded a bare 2900 years ago. The tale of its foundation shows what sort of conditions obtained in the Palestine of those days. They were devilishly grim by all showing—but the recorded facts speak so truly for themselves, that, bloody though they are, they carry conviction in their very telling. In the Bible there is no mealy-mouthed

denunciation of the terrible acts which were committed, the scribes who wrote down the account exultantly believed that the traitors, intriguers and murderers were chosen instruments of God's vengeance.

The King of Northern Israel, Bassha, was very much a man of his own day, though the scribes of later centuries saw in him a malignant criminal, mainly because he mixed with the nations around him and used their methods. After a reign of twenty-four years, a period which in itself proves that he must have been a mighty and a strong ruler, he died, and was succeeded by his son, Elah.

Elah must have been a man such as we all meet to this day, an undisciplined, invertebrate, wealthy degenerate; he was assassinated by one of his Tank Corps generals whilst he was dead drunk in his steward's house in his capital, Tirzah, which, by the way, is now the small peasant village of Talouzah about twelve miles east-north-east of Samaria. Zimri, the murderer, in the time-honoured fashion of Oriental despots, made it his first job to kill all the males of the royal family; and the scribe who wrote 1st Kings xvi, smugly observes that this ambitious general was merely fulfilling the doom decreed by God—a strange God, He whom the ancient Hebrews worshipped, in essence much the same capricious and repressive Almighty Gloom of half the four hundred sects who flourish in our England to-day.

One of the usual wars against the Philistines was going on at the time. The territorial levies in camp close to the front were distinctly peeved when they heard that a junior general like Zimri had wiped out

the king and the royal family, and they promptly voted their own G.O.C., Omri, to the throne.

The Philistines must have been very relieved when the Israelite fighting-men moved out of camp and marched for Talouzah. In seven days they had besieged and taken the town, whereupon Zimri committed painful suicide by firing the palace over his own head. As a reward for all his murders and his treasons, he won only seven day's reign; and even that short week was filled with battle, murder and sudden death.

Some other scribe takes up the tale at this point, for verses 18-20 give Zimri his rightful name of "traitor"—and once again smugly asserts that Israel was punished for its idolatrous breakaway. It must have been some man of Judah who wrote the account, for he is so very elated about it all.

But Omri's work was not finished—for half the nation followed the cause of Tibni—and there was some pretty desperate fighting in these hills and valleys before Tibni was "liquidated" as our Soviet and Nazi friends say nowadays. I do not blame Omri for being disgusted with Talouzah as a seat of government—the place was simply reeking with memories of assassinated kings and vile treason. He bought this hill from a man called Shemer—and it certainly deserved its name, which signifies "a look-out hill".

Omri, also, gets all the condemnation of the Jewish scribes—he "walked in the way of Jeroboam", et cetera—but he must have been a great and a judicious statesman to survive twelve years in that hell-broth of blood and murder, and to die in his bed at the end

of it all. In any case, his son, Ahab, was probably the greatest king that Israel ever had—but—Gosh! Poor Ahab! He is not only cursed for the usual “walking in the steps of Jeroboam”, but receives an especial yell of priestly rage for daring to marry the Sidonian princess, Jezebel, and allowing her a private domestic chapel. There seem to be points of similarity between Charles the First and Ahab, though Ahab was by far the greater man. Henrietta Maria’s chapel in London, and Jezebel’s oratory on Samaria’s hilltop, seem to have caused identical reactions.

Samaria may have been built to give the new kings of Israel a fresh start, away from the bloodstained surroundings of Talouzah, but it was soon as deeply infested as the old capital had been. I sat on the peak of the hill, above the wind-blown olive trees, and gazed down on what the archæologists’ spades have uncovered of this centre of ancient sin and vice, of glory and of virtue triumphant.

We men of this world must be mad. Here is a place that has drunk the blood of scores of thousands of our kind—many of them sincere zealots who perished in what they believed were holy causes, patriotism, nationalism and religion—and what does it now matter? We are still just as crazy. Now scream at me for having no sense of idealism, for not “respecting the blood of martyrs as the seed of all good causes”—for gross materialism, if you like—but I am hanged if I can see how passing through a blood-bath of misery and cruelty is to be of any use to us if the persecuted in their turn are to be as blinded and bigoted as their erstwhile persecutors.

If I felt assured of immortality I might look on it differently; but then I am not sure—I merely hope, or, at least, I almost believe that I do.

I trust that when I come to die my main feeling will be one of intense curiosity. I hope that my inquisitiveness will overpower any pain or agony that I shall feel at the solving of the riddle; at the point of discovering for myself whether there is any Life outside this suitcase of flesh and blood, bones and gristle, which I am condemned to carry about with me. Whether I, the being deep within me, which is so blinded that it feels itself to be the hub of the universe, this individualistic “me”, which cannot conceive how Life will go on without my presence, will merely disappear into intense and comfortable blackness like the vehicle it has carried about.

I shook myself—like most other healthy men I am not morbid. In any case, it does not matter—I shall discover the answer for myself in due course. Meanwhile, not only because there may be truth in the doctrines which I have been taught (and so good behaviour is, perhaps, advisable as “fire insurance”), it is pleasant and comfortable to treat others decently and to do nothing which will cause hurt or suffering to fellow-mortals. I will, therefore, do my best to read, strive to understand, and, when once grasped, to copy, the life once led by the Master who so often passed by the foot of this hill, on his way between Jerusalem and Galilee.

There are many things to be seen on this ruined site of what was once a mighty city—the remains of the hippodrome, the palace, and the gateway towers of

the great town which Herod named Sebaste in honour of Cæsar Augustus. Maybe those gateway towers are remains of the fortifications of Omri and Ahab, the very place in which the lord who was "third man" in the war-chariot of King Jehoram was crushed to death by the mob of hungry folk dashing out to loot the Syrian camp.

I am not a pacifist in the political sense of the word, for I can see how necessary it is that we should be able to guard our own hearths and families against greedy enemies—but, if you want to know something of the horrors of war to the civilian population, take a few minutes to yourself and read that sixth chapter of 2nd Kings. Try to imagine the state of the woman who boiled and ate her own child in the madness of starvation. War may be logical; then let us be logical to its logical end. The cannibal-mother was naught but a brutal logician—the weakest to the wall and the Devil take the hindmost. There have been many assassinations and murders on this now desolate hill of Samaria—the slaughter of that child must fill the place of the most terrible.

The whole story of that siege speaks for itself. If you sit quietly on the hill you can almost see the little band of outcast lepers, with naught to lose, making their way to the besiegers' lines, and their incredulous amazement at finding them abandoned and full of stores. You can hear the amazing news spreading through the streets which once were here, and the thunder of that rush of frantic starving folks making for the gateway and the food in the enemy's tents.

Samaria has a long and a dreadful history. The

chapters dealing with it in the Bible are worth the reading—not from any morbid desire to gloat on treachery, on wounds, and on death, but as a means of discovering for yourself the intense realism of the Book. It will convince you, and put you in a frame of mind to read the more worthwhile passages—its philosophy of life and morals. A great and wonderful library of man's thoughts, emotions, and hopes is this old Record, and I am very, very grateful that I have been able to discover it for myself. Nearly every family in our own land has a copy of the Bible somewhere in the house; if only they could be taught to read it for the wisdom that lies within it—and they would if it was not so bound up with compulsory Sunday Schools, and dreary, ill-informed Scripture lessons. There is a great future, greater even than its past, in front of the Bible, when people once get away from the false light in which it has been presented to them.

I am only an ignorant farmer—no scholar, of no particular education—and a couple of years ago I would have grinned from ear to ear in sheer astonishment and amusement, if anyone had suggested that I should read the Bible. Why has this most glorious heritage of ours been spoilt for us by ignorant so-called interpretations? Let everyone know in what manner and under what conditions it was compiled, and once again it will come into favour as the backbone of our daily lives.

Whether you believe that the Master was God incarnate, God made Flesh, come down to save a sinful world; or whether you think of and respect Him for being



the greatest man who ever lived because of the purity and beauty of His teaching; whether you consider the Bible as the inspired Word of God, or merely as the most ancient and beautiful of chronicles; whether you merely look upon it as a storehouse of the wisdom of an old Oriental people or as a fairly authentic, if narrow and biassed, history of events—there is something in that Book for everyone. So let us, for pity's sake, have it properly given to us, and let our professional interpreters change their tune and forget their own personal sectarian opinions. Let them give a free and frank account of its beginnings, its writers, the conditions and purposes for which they wrote; and then allow every man to read for himself and to form his own conclusions.

Above all keep it out of the schools; do not weary children with it, so that they will turn away in disgust when they reach adult age. That happened to you and me, and, speaking for myself, would, but for a sheer accident, have caused me to lose one of the most valued treasures of my life. No! Keep the Book until children are eighteen at least. I do not mean that they should not be taught the principles of religion before that—they should be grounded in them from infancy, but do not thrust texts and Bible-stories down their poor little maws, which are not nearly ready for such strong meat. They will be grateful later on, when they are old enough to understand.

I passed on to a consideration of the New Testament as I walked over the hill and entered the big mosque in the village. This mosque was once a great church of the Crusaders, dedicated to St. John Baptist—the

tombs of Elisha, Obadiah and John Baptist were all shown here at one time—and it is quite possible that the latter was beheaded in Samaria, though others place the scene of his decapitation at the Castle of Mācharaeus close to the eastern shores of the Dead Sea. In any case, his head was brought here, and it seems most probable that the execution took place in Samaria itself, for there seems to have been little delay between sentence, the stroke of the headsman's axe, and the carrying in of the gory trophy upon Salome's meat-dish.

Have you ever bothered to consider what a strange figure is this same John Baptist? I don't suppose so; I know that I had not myself, until recently. I knew that he was supposed to be the Master's cousin—that his mother was named Elizabeth, and that she bore him when she was past the normal age for childbirth. I had a dim recollection of hearing a wonder-story about his father being a priest called Zacharias who saw an angel whilst he was taking his turn in the Temple liturgy—the tale is in Luke i. Last winter I read a story in one of the apocryphal gospels, the Protoevangelion of James, a yarn of how a mountain opened to receive Elizabeth, and the unborn child she was carrying, when they were fleeing before the assassins sent after them by Herod, and that was about all I knew of him, except for the last scenes of his head being carried in on a dish as a present to the dancing-girl.

In any case, John Baptist made much more of a stir and impression upon the people who were living at his time than the Master did. There is quite a lot

about him in the Chronicle of Josephus, who was born only twenty-six years after the Crucifixion. He hardly mentions the Master—merely gives a passing paragraph to the “Demagogue of Nazareth” who was executed by Pontius Pilate, but about John he has a deal to say.

The Master Himself continually refers to John, and even thirty years after the Crucifixion there were Christians who accepted John's baptism, as you may see in Acts xviii, 25 and xix, 3, and who had to be convinced that the baptism of the Master was preferable.

Somewhere in the rubble of this hilltop, amongst the thousands of scattered bones, lie those of Elisha and John. The dust which clung to my boots may once have been the Baptist's body, or that of Ahab, or Mariamne the wronged wife of Herod, or that of her two sons. What was that tag I learned as a boy?

“Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay,  
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.”

Probably misquoted, but it may show what I felt as I sat there.

I was sorry for one old rascal who lived in Samaria—Simon the Sorcerer, who gave his name to that pet game of some churchmen, simony, the selling of ecclesiastical powers, privileges and goods for money or gain. Poor Simon, he was convinced enough to be baptized, and, if he did seek to turn a dishonest penny later on out of that fact, well, there have been plenty like him since his day. Simon may have been sincere—he was an earthy soul, and he saw no reason why

the Apostles should not want a cash reward for their secret. He would have asked it himself; he was only doing after the manner of his kind, and he must have been the most astonished and indignant person in the world when that bluff old fisherman, Peter, jumped on him with both feet. Simon the Sorcerer even had the courtesy to give Peter a mannerly answer; as a professional conjurer I don't suppose that he placed much significance on the curses he received.

The old legends make this same Simon the Sorcerer identical with Simon Magus. If you want to hear the same sort of claptrap as that you get from the founders and missionaries of some modern sects, the history of Simon Magus is worth the reading. The tale says that after his encounter with Peter, Simon set himself up for God. He bought a prostitute out of the bawdy-house at Tyre and took her about with him saying that she was his First Thought Incarnate, the Mother of All Things, by whom he had conceived in the beginning the idea of creating angels and archangels.

Helen the Bawd was supposed to have fallen into the power of these new spirits who kept her in subjection. She was said to be the same Helen of Troy of centuries before who caused the Trojan War. Her spiritual enemies had enclosed her in a human body, in which she wandered through the ages suffering various vicissitudes, until Simon found her again as a "lost sheep" in the Tyrian brothel. As he had discovered that his angels were mismanaging earthly affairs and persecuting his First Thought, Helen, Simon had made himself incarnate and come into the world to save both it and her. There was a whole lot more of the same

kind of rubbish, and the people of Rome, especially the idle women and popinjays of the upper classes swallowed the whole jumble of garbage, hook, line and sinker, as readily as a score of even wilder creeds have been snatched at by people of the same type in these days of ours. And they call it Religion—aye, and are neurotic enough to glory in persecution and martyrdom for its sake.

In any case, whether our Samaritan conjurer is the same Simon Magus or not, that great magician did exist during the first century, and he won fame and riches, he even had a statue erected to him in Rome, and Magus was certainly a Samaritan. He seems to have come very close to establishing a world religion at one time, but the attempt failed in the long run. Get hold of a copy of Simon's teachings and see how little originality there is in the new-fangled neurotic modern sects of our day. I found out about him in a book which the vicar lent me when I got home, an English translation of Tertullian, who wrote a deal denouncing Simon as a heretic.

It is very strange to read the sort of harebrained rubbish that people will swallow as religion, if it is only carefully enough jumbled. I had rather thought that martyrs were some proof of a Cause's truth until I began to know that each Cause and Creed, no matter how crazy, has had, and can still have, people willing, aye, and more than eager, anxious, to die for it. The only difference is that we consider them glorious martyrs if we agree with their opinions, and as mere stubborn blockheads, if no worse, when we do not.

That moral was pointed out even more strongly for me as I walked through the village of Sebastieh to join my car. Three military and police lorries arrived, and out of one car tumbled those terrible police-dogs under the charge of a British officer. They were starting on another man-hunt, pursuing people who appeared to them vicious murdering brigands, though the turbanned men of Samaria, standing sullenly by, considered them patriots and potential martyrs. There had been an attack on a party of British police doing a patrol in the mountains to the east of Samaria, and the avengers of blood were now hot on the trail.

I got into my car, and drove to Nablus, where I found a convoy forming up to go to Jerusalem. After booking a seat in one of the cars for five hundred mils, i.e. ten shillings, about twice the price I ought to have paid, I went back to the monastery, thanked my kindly hosts, and started for Jerusalem.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE convoy was a fairly slow one, as there were several lorries in it. I understood that this was not usual, as the swifter passenger convoys usually travel by themselves, but there had been a lot of fighting round Jenin, in which a British soldier of the Border Regiment had been killed, and an officer and two men wounded, so that all the fighting-men were engaged in chasing a large band of Arab rebels in the hills. I was told that nearly twenty of the attackers had been killed by aeroplanes which dived at them using machine-guns.

It is all right enough, I suppose. After all, Britain is Lord of Palestine by right of having conquered it, of having taken it from its previous overlords, the Turks, who were just as much foreigners as we are. There is certainly no such thing as a Palestinian nation, but, at least, these poor devils in the hills who were waging a hopeless war against a great Empire, did believe that they were defending their hearths and kindred against the starvation and destitution which was being forced upon them. Most of the British residents in Palestine call them brigands and bandits, and swear that they are only fighting to snatch what loot they can, but I seem to have heard and read the same story of most rebellions—the nearest case in point being the Sinn Fein struggle in Ireland.

Times change. De Valera does not now stand in the dock to hear himself sentenced to death as a traitor and rebel—he sits across the table from the British Prime Minister and negotiates, as an honoured equal, the future of his country. He was a condemned felon not so long ago, now he is the head of a nation of the British Commonwealth. In the same way let us hope that there will soon be justice done to these Palestinian Arabs, though they are having to plod the same sorrowful road of wounds, distress, starvation, and death that the Irish followed. My blood boils at the uselessness of all this bloodshed and hanging. Sooner or later we must negotiate—why not do it before any more decent-minded young folks, British, Jew and Arab, are killed?

I had some time to think over this problem of Palestine, and the whole-terrible pity is that there is so much of right and justice on all three sides, British, Jew and Arab. Worse, though it sounds a contradiction in terms, as things now stand, none can have full justice without injuring the other parties to the issue.

I heard quite a new side to the problem from a middle-aged Jewish farmer who sat beside me in the car as we drove up to Jerusalem. I will not give his right name, as the giving of names is a dangerous thing in present-day terror-ridden Palestine. As we sped across the plain south of Nablus, past the village of Awerta, close to Qoriyot, the hometown of Judas Iscariot, he told me the story of the first colonists and of the way they looked upon what was happening to their beloved Palestine.



We crossed a mountain ridge, with the lorry-load of British soldiers scouting carefully ahead; descended into a narrow plain between the mountains, and so came to Khan Lubban, where the convoy halted whilst some stores were delivered to the outpost. Lubban is Lebonah, and was the first stage on the old pilgrimage road to Jerusalem from Shechem, and it is certain that the Master must have slept here when on His way to and from the Festivals in the Temple. Lubban has been an inn for close on four thousand years, and probably longer. Close to it is the native village of Seilun, which once was Shiloh, where for close on three centuries, the Ark of the Covenant was installed.

I would have liked to spend a day or two tramping over these mountains, and visiting the villages, but that would have been equivalent to committing suicide. The convoy wound up the mountainside on the magnificent road built in majestic sweeping curves, reaching the summit close to Tel Assour, the Baal Hazor where Absalom slew his half-brother, Amnon, for defiling and seducing Tamar, his sister. A terrible incident that, so terrible that it carries conviction in itself. I took the trouble to read 2nd Samuel xiii, later on, after I had reached my quarters in Jerusalem.

To the right was a ruined tower outside a village, Sinjil. That name is extremely interesting, for it is one of the few Crusading ones to survive—it is called after Raymund St. Gilles, Count of Toulouse, one of the princes of the First Voyage of God, who came this way in 1099.

We dipped down into a very narrow valley, choked with olive trees, and I was told that we were passing along the Robber's Valley, the main pass through the mountains between Jerusalem and Nablus; the road which has been used for thousands of years, and by which the Master must have often tramped, grateful for the shadow cast in the hot afternoons by the mountains to the west.

But I am missing that talk I had with the Jewish farmer. He was, so he told me, the son of a man who had come to Palestine from Russia in the last years of the nineteenth century. They had settled down in various places, with very little money, and no knowledge of agriculture, and started farming settlements. This had been made financially possible by the generosity of Baron Rothschild, and physically possible by the self-sacrificing heroism of the men and women who had come to rehabilitate themselves in the land of their forefathers.

Their hardships had been terrible, their sufferings intense. They were unaccustomed to hard manual labour, and the toil required on the broken, rocky or marshy land allotted to them by the Turkish authorities had been of the most savage. One little tale may show what they endured. I had noticed the large and prosperous colony of Hedera on the coast near Caesarea as I flew north to Haifa, and my new friend told me the tale of how it had been formed.

Hedera was a place of the deadliest diseases, a multitude of choked streams, stagnant pools and quaking marshes then formed ideal breeding-grounds for swarms of anopheles, mosquitoes, and other insects,

which carried malaria in its most malignant forms, as well as other diseases such as the dreaded blackwater fever.

A group of young men and women started work upon the terrible place. They knew perfectly well that they were doomed, fully realized that death would claim them long before they could hope to see any return for their work; but they accepted this, believing that they were sacrificing themselves to prepare healthy surroundings for those who would come out from Europe to build a new Home for Israel on the foundation of their sacrifice.

The brave pioneers set to work to drain the pools and marshes, to set free the choked streams, and they died in their boots as they laboured. Imagine the sheer heroism of that group of idealists.

Without being called upon to face certain and very loathsome death by debilitating disease, it takes a lot of courage, when you are of the professional or university class, to condemn yourself, and your children—mind that last point, and your children—to be peasants. I am a peasant myself, and my forefathers have been tillers of the soil for many generations, so I can understand the greatness of the sacrifice that those city Jews made to become farmers. They saw that such a sacrifice was essential if they ever hoped to reinstate Israel in her own country. Jewry has every class except that of tillers of the soil—the incessant persecutions she has suffered have prevented her children from taking root—and to make Palestine a Home for their people, these pioneers realized that they must form a peasantry. Quietly, without fuss, unassumingly,



# THE NEW COMMUNAL SETTLEMENT IN THE SHARON VALLEY

Levelling the ground before the construction of buildings



they formed themselves into a peasantry, and suffered like Hades in so doing.

Perhaps you can now realize why I honour and respect these colonist-Jews of Palestine. To continue with my tale of Hedera:

One after another the young men and young women died of malaria and its kindred diseases. One after another the simple heroes and heroines were carried to their graves in the little plot on the outskirts of Hedera. Finally, one night the survivors stood around an open grave, their lanterns gleaming feebly, for it was not until after dark that they could turn from the savage toil of the drainage work to perform the last and most pitiful of the Corporal Works of Mercy. Suddenly Horror descended on that little band of fever-shaking, yellow-eyed idealists; of all the gallant crew only nine were left, and none of them could hope to survive for very long this foul Death which was opening its slaving chops for them.

For a long minute, as they stood staring down at the wrapped figure of the dead comrade lying in his water-logged Long Home, Horror gripped them, Despair gibbered at their elbows. For a moment their high courage faltered, their knightly youth rebelled at the prospect of extinction.

The whole future of Israel's return to her Homeland lay a-quiver in the balance.

Then the wonderful thing happened. Their leader lifted his eyes to the night sky, to the glowing heaven-lights of Palestine, to the stars which had shone on the young David facing deadly peril; on Judas Macca-beus and his brethren; and they corruscated their

message of courage and hope into his heart. In a sturdy, resonant, manly voice he intoned that great song of national hope and faith triumphant—the Hebrew song which these Jews reverence as their racial anthem—the *Hatikvah*.

His comrades drew in their breaths. Dull eyes, wearied with toil, yellowed with sickness, glowed again. With one accord they joined hands, their voices rang out, full of hope restored, of vows renewed, joining in the stirring cadences of that mighty song. With a sudden spontaneous joy, in the fitful light of the flickering lanterns, beneath the eyes of the staring stars, they started to circle in the ancient dance of their Hebrew forefathers around the open grave, amidst the low mounds which covered all that was left of the gallant comrades who had fallen in the battle to restore Israel to her Motherland.

Dancing! These highly-civilized products of Universities and the school of Europe, were, in one instant, swept back to expressing their emotions in the most primitive, sincere, and beautiful of all ways. As my farmer friend told me the story, my mind went irresistably to that other scene, where another great idealist of their race had expressed his overflowing emotions in a similar way. I was not sure of the exact text; King David dancing before the Ark when he brought that symbol of national sovereignty home to Jerusalem after its years of shameful captivity. Aye, and I suppose that there are people, to-day, as scornful as was Micah, daughter of King Saul, folk who would despise so spontaneous a demonstration of fundamental emotions. We British believe ourselves to be

so very phlegmatic and stolid, we have been taught to so regard ourselves—cartoonists and comic-strips perpetuate the lie—but read how those crazy London folk go daft over a film star, or some fatuous nonentity of a visiting foreign minor royalty.

My friend told me many things which surprised me. I had grown to look upon the Palestine Problem as a clear-cut struggle between Arabs and Jews, with Britain acting as a somewhat biassed umpire. Now I found that I was quite wrong—all the Jews were not keen to set up a Jewish State, and many did not look upon the Arabs in the same light that their ancestors had regarded the Canaanites of Joshua's time.

My friend belonged to a section of opinion which I can only describe as the Old Colonists—the men who had been settled in Palestine before the War, and their children who had been born in the country. The Old Colonists, naturally, resented the terrible chaos which had come upon their land, and resent still more the fact that it is the ignorance and intolerance of many of their own people which has caused it. They are intense individualists—what might be called rigid Conservatives in our British sense—they believed in private enterprises, in every man and his family working out their own schemes of life and their own fortunes, and were strenuously opposed to Communism in every form. They hated the doctrines of many of the newcomers, the Marxist doctrines of the new labourers, and their intolerance of an employer class.

As a farmer myself I could sympathize with them from the bottom of my heart. I know on how narrow a margin man can win the necessities of life, and some



measures of comfort for his wife and youngsters, as a tiller of the soil. Consequently I saw how unjust it was for them to be forced by political coteries to employ unskilled Jewish labour at nearly two-and-a-half times the cost of skilled Arab farmhands; and, more, to be treated with contempt and rudeness by these raw inefficients, when they could have had courtesy, friendship and co-operation from the Arabs with whom they had worked all their lives.

Then there was another point: men like my friend had grown up with Arab children, had known them as playmates, had been farmers' sons growing to manhood amongst the men who would one day serve them. They had spoken Arabic as their second language; they understood, respected and loved their Arab neighbours, and the Arabs felt the same way towards them. The same sort of thing which must have happened during the days of the Second Generation in Norman-settled Ireland; or in our own England when the Saxons laid the battle-axe aside, started to break up the valley-bottoms with their six-ox ploughs and employed the sons of the conquered Britons to work for them.

Consequently there was a fellow-feeling between Jews of this type and the Arabs such as the newcomers could not hope to achieve. The troubles of the years since the ending of the Great War have now made good relationship quite impossible, and, if all the farmer told me about the manner in which the new colonists hold their land is correct, there seems to be very little chance of their ever being any peace between the two races.

The new colonists are tenant-farmers bound by agreements which will always tell against their co-operation with their Arab neighbours. They hold their land on long lease, leases which if all the conditions are observed, can be regarded as almost ownership, but, if any farmer should dare to hold different opinions to his landlords, would entail eviction for him.

For instance, they have to agree to employ only Jewish labour. This sounds only fair and reasonable, especially when it has been impressed upon them that the reason for this stipulation is not to find employment for Jewish farmhands and labourers, but to escape any charge of enslaving the Arabs, and so allowing people to think that the Jews have come to make the natives into drawers of water and hewers of wood, as happened to the ancient Canaanites. But, and it is here that the rub comes, the Arab does not understand this, and only sees himself being excluded from work on the land which he has been accustomed to look upon as his own.

Jewish labour is far more expensive than Arab. Naturally so, for the Jew has a far higher standard of life than the native—after all, he is a European, and it will take several generations before he can compete with the Asiatic upon his own ground. They, the Jewish labourers are justly, I suppose, determined to prevent this degeneration ever happening; they prefer to raise the Arab to their standard, and who can blame them? Yet that difference in wages makes great hardship for the Jewish smallholder; he needs added help at certain seasons of the year—harvest and threshing

times—and when he has to employ expensive labour his profits are slashed to nothing.

So, it seems, everyone is dissatisfied; the farmer because he sees himself working for less than nothing, often with a loss on his whole year's work; the Jewish labourer because he so rightly fears that his own status must in the long run, be lowered, and, in any case, he is often infected with the philosophy of falsely-taught Communism or, at least, perverted Socialism. Who can blame him? He works desperately hard and sees little chance of security for his family and himself. He does not realize the terribly hard conditions scourging the master who employs him. Then the Arab, excluded from his chance to work for the newcomers and desperately poor, hates the Jewish farmer, and is ripe for any mischief that may be suggested to him.

Still, I came out to see Palestine, and its labour problems have nothing to do with me, I have enough of them at home, with every likely lad leaving our West Dorset villages and flocking to the towns. But these Old Colonists are in quite a different class. The Arabs know them, they farm their own land, and they can employ anyone they choose. The Arabs are accustomed to them, and like them, though there is now the great danger of hired assassins from outside Palestine, in the employ of some of the more desperate and irresponsible Moslem leaders, being unable to distinguish between them and the newcomer Zionists.

Little things he said amazed me. I had already gathered some idea of the terrible intolerance of the Moslem fanatic, of the way in which he despises the Infidel, whether he be Christian or Jew. And here

was just the point in which the Old Colonists, or some of them, showed their understanding and sympathy with the Arabs amongst whom they had been reared.

One of the most noted Old Colonists, at his own charges, arranges for Arabs from the villages near his farm to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, the Haj which all Moslems aspire to make at least once in their lifetimes. Can you imagine any more genuine attempt to show friendship for the Arab? Or one more likely to win their gratitude and esteem? What is more, so said my farmer friend, these benefactions are made in so comradely and tactful a manner that he did not offend the haughty susceptibilities of the proud peasants, for, no matter how poor he is, there is no haughtier person on earth than the Moslem Arab.

I was told, and I later found to be accurate one of the most amazing stories that I have ever heard—a tale that should be known by each and every person in our own country. It is as great an epic of heroism and self-sacrifice as any in the Bible, or in the history of any land under God's sun. I will try to give its outline.

It happened during the War; and please do not shy away at the mention of a War story; for these youngsters were never given the reward for which they faced torture, hardships and death in the most cheerful manner in the world.

The Old Colonists, or a group of them, realized that the only hope of their ever being able to bring to pass their ideal of restoring Israel to her Homeland, was to do all that they could to ensure the victory of the Allies. Do not go running away with the notion that

they saw which side was winning, and were determined to be amongst the victors. When they made their decision the case looked very black for Britain and her Allies. We had been defeated at the Dardanelles, Russia was tottering, our armies had been hurled back into the Sinai Desert from Gaza, and things were very bad on the Western Front. In fact, I suppose that the odds were then about 5 to 3 in Germany's favour.

The defeat of our troops at the First Battle of Gaza was the time which these young heroes of both sexes chose for their help to be offered. Call them spies if you like, and affect to despise spying; but you will agree that there is no braver person in the world than the Intelligence Agent, especially when that person faces shame, pain and death for no monetary reward. In fact their leader, the same man whose benefactions to the Arabs I have mentioned above, threw back in the teeth of the British Government the £10,000 it attempted to offer him as a reward. There is none of the glory and shouting of the soldier in their lonely trade; and, if they are caught, they die, alone and disowned by the people for whom they have risked their lives.

I must get on with my story, however. A number of the younger colonists banded themselves together into an association which they called the Nilis, with the object of collecting as much information as they could about Turkish and German military matters, and communicating them to the Allied High Command. Prime movers amongst this brotherhood were the Aaronsohns.

The most dangerous part of their task was to get their information to the British. To do this they used a number of methods—simpler information was communicated by code—one of them was for a Nili to sit under a small tree with a large quilt in front of him as though he were cleaning or repairing it. British aircraft noted the position of the man and his quilt in respect to the tree, and of a smaller light-coloured patch upon the quilt itself. Other methods were just as ingenious, but complicated messages had to be taken by hand—and it was then that these youngsters ran their greatest risks.

The only comparatively safe way to get their information through was for the messenger to swim out from the lonely beaches near the ruins of imperial Caesarea, and to wait until he was picked up by one of the patrol-boats. In the same way the man had to make his return. Many of the young idealists died in a variety of ways, but the remainder carried on, steadfastly and unafraid. Remember they had no need to help us, they had every reason to prefer a strict neutrality, for whichever side eventually won the War was likely to court Jewish settlers in Palestine—but they honestly believed that by their self-sacrifice, and invaluable work, they would pile up a debt of gratitude which, in honour bound, the British must repay, if victory crowned their arms.

One day, Sarah Aaronsohn, the sister of the Nili leader, was arrested by Turkish officers. She was treated with all the fiendishness of the Inquisition, in efforts to make her betray the names of her comrades. She was only a child-woman, scarce grown to

womanhood, but she stood up to her torturers and her potential executioners with all the heroism of a Joan of Arc, an Agnes of Rome, or a Catherine of Alexandria.

The least of the torments they inflicted upon her was the tearing out of her nails—and it does not take much imagination to picture what other threats were levelled against her femininity—the usual things that are to be expected in such brutal circumstances. But they got never a word from Sarah, until in desperation, they said that they would take her to their headquarters where there were facilities and time to use more terrible measures to make her talk.

Very horrible when you come to think of it, if you will just allow yourself to imagine the bestiality and brutality which the young girl was facing—and death on the gallows was just about the least of her terrors. She could have bought her life easily enough, but, as I have said, Sarah was of the Heaven-sent breed of the Joans, of the Agneses and the Catherines—the idea of betrayal never entered her mind.

But she was afraid—mightily afraid—but it was of herself, and of her weak woman's body of which she was afraid. She asked for permission to withdraw to her father's bathroom, to make some attempt to clean up the bloody, torn mess they had made of her; and there must have been someone amongst the officers not quite so brutal as the rest, for the permission was given.

A pistol shot rang out, and when they had forced the door they found Sarah dying from a self-inflicted wound. She rallied her last strength to smile at her

infuriated tormenters, and to tell them that she had not shot herself because she feared them or anything that they might do to her, but because she was afraid that excess of torment might lead to delirium, and that, whilst she was helpless, she would babble something which could betray her comrades. With her last breath she told them that the Allies would win, and that the dawn of Israel's rebirth in her Motherland was close at hand.

So died Sarah Aaronsohn—the Martyr-Maid who gave her life for her race, firmly believing in the promises given by Britain. I felt cold shame creeping over me when I heard the tale—shame for my own people—for shabby, flabby politicians who have made her sacrifice come to naught.

But, inspired by the death of the Maid, her comrades pressed on. When victory came at last, and the last Turkish soldier was in flight across the Taurus Mountains, when the last German officer was racing for Constantinople, Allenby sent for the Nilis, thanked them for their aid, said that without their assistance he could never have executed the great stroke of strategy which ended the War, for the collapse of Turkey soon brought Germany and Austria to their knees. He asked them what reward they required, telling them not to be shy in making their demands, for no sum of money could adequately repay them for all that they had done.

Their leader stood forward, and said, promptly and very courteously, that they did not want a penny-piece; all that they asked was peace and security to rebuild the Home of Israel in Israel's ancient Mother-

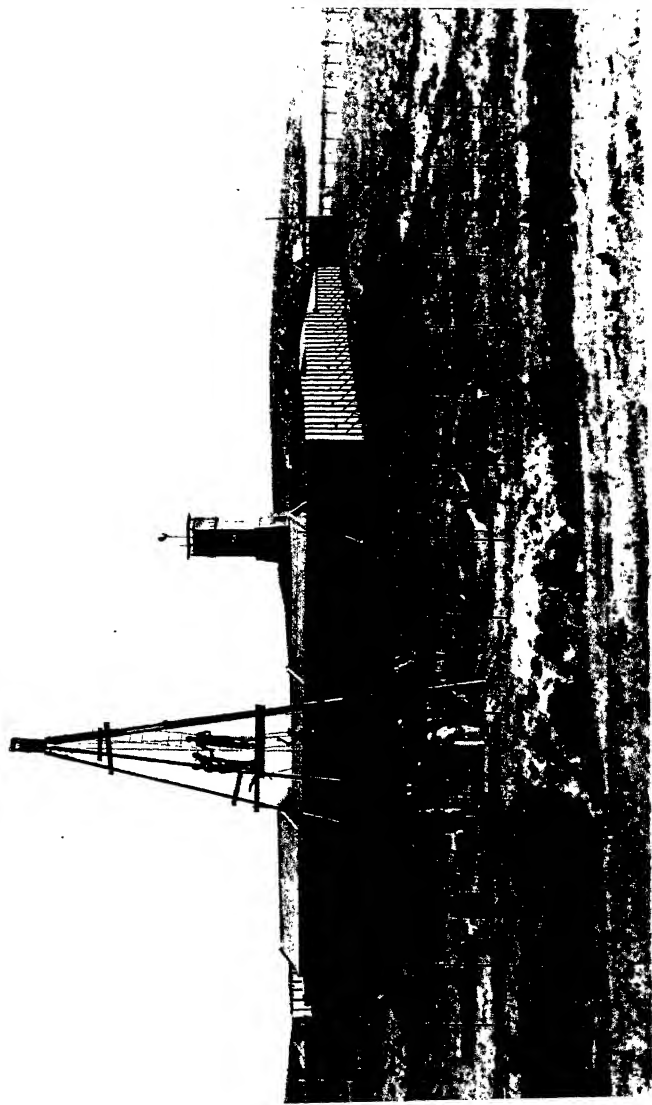


land. Now take off your hats to this band of heroes and call them self-seeking spies if you dare.

And their reward? Well, the very fact that we were travelling along Palestine's greatest highway under an escort of armed troops and armoured-cars answered that. The sandbagged, barbed-wire outposts on the sides of the road showed how much of peace and security nearly twenty years of British rule has brought to unhappy Palestine. If any further answer is required, you can see it in the breastworks and redoubts surrounding every Jewish farmhouse and agricultural colony.

But worse was to follow for the Old Colonists. Their greatest hopes were to be dashed by men of their own race. Before the War, Jews in Palestine had had the respect of the Arabs for their probity, peacefulness and their high moral outlook. That was all to disappear. The vast majority of the Zionist immigrants were people of the highest ideals—but there was a section of disgruntled, disloyal and pernicious men and women, lazy good-for-nothing work-shys, determined to win ease and affluence without the need of sweating for it. Perverted Socialism, Bolshevism, and worse, came in with some of the newcomers, and the leaven spread. For the first time there were Jewish prostitutes in modern Palestine, a terrible blow to the Old Colonists whose women and girls had won the respect of the Arabs for their virtue.

That Jewish farmer did me a lot of good, with his tales of heroism and disinterested selflessness. I had seen so much of the other sort of thing in this Palestine, that it acted as an antidote, and as we neared



THE NUCLEUS OF A NEW JEWISH AGRICULTURAL SETTLEMENT

Note the watch-tower and fortified stockade in the background, and the derrick for water-boring in the foreground



Jerusalem, passing through the rocks of the high tableland of Judea, I felt a new sweetness welling up inside me. Remember them—the Nine who Danced—the Maid who died for Palestine—the Jewish farmer who sent Moslem pilgrims to Mecca—they are worth remembering when one thinks of this seething mess which greed, envy, fear, treason, misplaced zeal, intolerance, incompetence, and hate have made of this most unholy Holy Land.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

WE passed through the huddled houses of Bireh, a miserable village which once was Beeroth, where traditionally Marymother and old Joseph, her husband, first missed their first-born child. The Boy was twelve at that time, and it is not difficult to picture the harassed mother torn with anxiety, surrounded by her frightened younger children, whilst the old carpenter of Nazareth searched for Him in the crowded streets of Jerusalem.

A boyish act, this of the Master's. It proves Him to have been a normal, happy-go-lucky boy, too filled with the wonder of life and the strange sights in the city even to think of the distress he was causing His anxious parents. Nothing of calculated mischief in it, merely sheer boyish thoughtlessness. Thus I made another contact with Him, took another step away from the stained-glass effigy of emasculate Perfection, found another facet of character to prove His essential humanity.

Two or three miles beyond Bireh we drove across an aerodrome, set right in the watershed of the Judean Mountains, and I saw the minaret of Nebi Samwil, which the Moslems believe to be the Tomb of Samuel, jutting out on the rocky western skyline.

The whole of this plateau between Bireh and Jerusalem is packed with places associated with the

days of Samuel and the early Hebrew Monarchy. Nebi Samwil is Mizpah, where Saul was elected King in 1095 B.C. A little village, Er Ram, a short distance from the aerodrome is Rama, where once lived Deborah, the lady who helped Barak to drive Sisera to his grisly death beneath Jael's mallet and tenpenny nail. Saul, the King, was annointed in Rama, which was then Samuel's residence. The village is also mentioned in Matthew ii, 18, in connexion with Herod's Massacre of the Innocents, as proof of the prophecy in Jeremiah xxxi, 15. This business of arrogating everything Jeremiah and the rest of the prophets ever said to one's own time seems to be an ancient custom. Matthew believed it applied to his own day, as brazenly as some of our queer sectaries in England claim Jeremiah and Isaiah's supremely clever political forecasts to be aimed at Chamberlain, Roosevelt, the Pope, Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini.

A tall hill beside the road, crowned with a pile of rubble excavated by the archæologists' spades, is called Tel-el-Ful. It was one of the most hotly contested strong-points held by the Turks against Allenby's victorious hosts, twenty-one years ago. This hill is Gibeah of Benjamin, or Gibeah of Saul, where King Saul had his home and held his court. That most pitiful scene of any described in the whole ancient Chronicle, the poor mother Rizpah keeping guard over the slaughtered, hanging bodies of the sons whom she had borne to Saul, took place on its slopes.

David, the despotic tyrant whom our teachers tell us to regard as a saint and a holy man, wreaked this foul political murder, but even his stony heart was

touched by the love and devotion of that poor mother, so that at last he gave them honourable burial, though how that advantaged the poor youths I cannot see.

In one particular that tale roused the very worst in me. Read the account in 2nd Samuel xxi, 9th verse, and onwards. The smug, fatuous complacency of the greasy little scribe, or the gaunt priest who wrote verse 9, infuriated me.

"And he (David) delivered them (the seven sons of Saul) into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the hill *before the Lord*: and they fell all seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days of the beginning of barley harvest."

"*Before the Lord!*" Pah! And yet—and yet! Was not this another of those little incidents which go so far to prove the authenticity of the old Tale—one more piece of evidence which makes its appeal, that shows the truth of the words the fanatical, self-satisfied scribe wrote down.

Rizpah, too, by her devotion, dry-eyed in her stony grief, forms a vivid picture of all womanhood devastated and made forlorn by man's senseless jealousies and wickedness. She typifies the essence of loving, outraged motherhood. I began more and more to despise the Hebrew manhood of ancient days, as I contemplated the greatness of the nation's womanhood. Judith, Esther, Jael, Deborah, Sarah, Ruth, Jezebel (though she was an outlander she was Israelite by marriage), and now this poor, heroic, devoted mother of slaughtered sons, Rizpah.

The road bends at right angles from the foot of Tel-el-Ful, a grey stone village stands at the elbow

whose name, Shaafat, stands amongst the battle-honours of several British regiments. Once it was Nob, where Saul slew the priests because they had made themselves "accessories after the fact" by aiding David's escape. 1st Samuel xxii, 17, states Saul's charge against them:

"And the king said unto the footmen that stood about him, Turn, and slay the priests of the Lord; because their hand also is with David, and because they knew when he fled, and did not shew it to me. But the servants of the king would not put forth their hand to fall upon the priests of the Lord."

Saul found a mercenary Arab Intelligence officer willing to do his terrible work; Doeg the Edomite had no scruples, and promptly murdered eighty-five of the resident clergy, and scores of their women and children. No wonder that Saul's name has been made into a stinking by-word by the priestly scribes who wrote the Chronicle.

East of Shaafat stands a small hill, with a building on its crest. It is the last pumping-station which brings water from the head of the Brook Kerith, the supposed "green pastures" and "still waters" of the 23rd Psalm, to supply modern Jerusalem.

Over a hill-crest now streams the asphalted road, and abruptly I was looking down on Jerusalem. Like a picture suddenly unfurled I discovered the Holy City. To the left, at my own level ran the ridges of Mount Scopus and the Mount of Olives with its serried ranks of British soldiers' graves. Below me lay a confused mass of red-tiled houses, domes, a section of yellow-battlemented walls, and some great towers.



Little of the Old City is visible from this height, though much of the New Town lies open below.

I saw the black cupola of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the green Dome of the Rock, which covers the site of the Holy of Holies. A barricade straddled the road below the ridge, manned by steel-helmeted British Police, armed with rifles and revolvers. They searched us very thoroughly for arms and explosives. I protested that I was a British subject, but my flannel trousers and old tweed jacket were not imposing, and I suppose that I was set down as a "poor white", not worthy of any consideration, because I was not travelling with Thomas Cook or some other of the tourist companies.

I was in no good mood when I was decanted at the Damascus Gate, handed my battered suitcase, and told how to find the Casa Nova, the great Franciscan pilgrim hospice where I was booked to stay. There were many Arabs sitting around little tables at a coffee-house, and the street was packed with Arab chauffeurs waiting for fares. I suddenly discovered that I was being regarded with baleful hostile eyes by everyone in the crowd, and I shivered with dread. They took me for a Jew, stranded and alone. In the hot glances of hatred shot at me, I recognized Death. Death only held back because a knot of British police were standing behind a close-by stone parapet in the Government buildings which overlooked the square before Damascus Gate. I lost no time in reaching them, although the armed sentry at the gates tried to turn me back. I used Edgar's name, however, and was instantly admitted.

A red-faced, jovial British sergeant walked up and asked if he could do anything for me. I told him who I was, and said that I wanted to reach the Casa Nova.

"You take my tip, sir," he said. "Keep out of the streets unless you have an armed escort. These devils shoot and then get clear away into the Old City before any of us have time to stop 'em. If you want to see Jerusalem, you had best join some organized group and go about under guard. 'Taint nowise safe to be wandering around loose, these days."

I thanked him, and then asked him if there was any way for me to reach the Casa Nova.

"There's a lorry going up to the Central Barracks at the Citadel in a few minutes," he said. "If you'd care to ride in it, you'd be able to get close to the Casa Nova. I expect Corporal Sanderson at the barracks'll give you an escort to the hospice. Hold on a minute, I'll telephone and ask him to do it."

He walked into the guardroom, and came back in a few minutes, grinning all over his face.

"They're expecting you up at the barracks, sir. Ask for the Divisional Inspector; your cousin has told him that you will be arriving. Now, if you're ready, the lorry is too."

I sat amongst half a dozen sun-bronzed British constables in the Morris lorry, and saw that every man of them had his rifle ready, with bolt drawn back, cartridge in breech, and his thumb on the safety-catch. However, we reached the top of the steep hill which runs beside the battlemented wall of Jerusalem, and turned sharp left into a busy street, in safety. After

a few minutes we passed through a breach in the walls beside the Jaffa Gate, and thence along the side of the dry moat beneath the great towers of the Citadel, until we came to the guarded entrance of the Central Barracks.

Here my troubles seemed to end, for an officer was waiting for me. He was a close friend of Edgar's, and he ordered a British constable to escort me to the Franciscan Hospice, saying that I should be welcome whenever I cared to call at their mess.

The Casa Nova lies in a narrow street between the New and the Jaffa Gates, completely closed in by houses. It is a large building, built in four storeys round a central courtyard. The bedrooms are airy, clean, cool and well furnished with comfortable beds. Meals are served on long tables in a large dining-hall; carafes of Chianti stand ready every few feet, and the food, of Italian style, is plentiful, well cooked and tasty. The Franciscan Friar in charge of the Hospice, and the three Italian nuns who overlook the domestic arrangements, are cheerful, very kindly souls and do all that they possibly can to make their pilgrim guests contented and happy. The servants, male and female, are Christian Arabs. I was very happy and comfortable in the Casa Nova, and I am extremely grateful to those kindly hosts who did so much for me in Palestine.

The big Hospice was practically empty, there were only four guests besides myself, three of them Italian ladies, and the other a young American on vacation from his university. I struck up a close friendship with him, as I found him a most interesting and com-

radely sort of chap. He had already been three weeks in Jerusalem, and, as he had visited all the shrines and sites several times, I was only too glad to avail myself of his offer to act as guide.

I will not describe in detail all the places I visited. That has been done a hundred times before, and in far better words than any I can hope to employ.

I will merely mention the other places to which we went: Mount Zion with its two sites of the House of Caiaphas the High Priest; its spurious cenacle, purporting to be the "upper-room" in which He ate His Last Supper; the house where Peter fled after he had heard the cock crow thrice; and the genuine ruins of Solomonic Jerusalem. We visited the Greek Patriarchate, a vast fortified palace in the middle of Jerusalem, once the residence of the Crusading Patriarchs of Jerusalem, whose political strivings, hidden under a mask of religion, did so much to wreck the Latin Kingdom.

We saw the Pool of Hezekiah, the Pool of Probatika, the Fountain of Siloam and the two Pools of Gihon. We walked round the foot of the city walls, from Damascus Gate east, and then southwards past the walled-in Golden Gate, to turn west up Mount Zion and then northwards along the glacis of the Citadel, its dry-moat now filled in and used as a car-park, until we reached the New Gate and so regained the Casa Nova after a hot and dusty walk of four miles. Our walk was marred by an encounter with a party of Arab ruffians near the Dung Gate, from whom we only escaped by proving, to our considerable embarrassment, that we did not bear the mark of Abraham's race in our flesh.

A very nasty five minutes, and I shivered when I realized how very close we had been to murder in that lonely spot.

I paid a flying visit to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and came out disheartened and made miserable by what I saw. Disgusted for many reasons by the pious and impious frauds which were shown to us; for instance, the alleged Pillar of the Scourging, which we were invited to touch with a sawn-off broom handle through a small aperture, and then show our faith by making a donation and kissing the greasy end of the stick. I saw chapels supposed to be connected with every single episode of the Passion; I was even shown a stone which I was told was the geographical Centre of the World. Calvary, the Tomb, the Stone of Unction, the Chapel of the Angel, the site of the Crowning with Thorns—each and every conceivable spot, and all displayed with the knowledge that every one of them must be a complete and wilful sham calculated to impose upon the credulity of the pilgrims.

I was also bitterly and deeply personally ashamed. The state of the fabric of the venerable Basilica is a standing reproach to our Britain. Here is a monument, perhaps the most noble in all the world—one that has commanded the zeal and fervour of close upon sixteen centuries—to hold which is the symbol of Frankish overlordship, yet we, the British conquerors, ostensible Christians, are allowing it to go to wrack and ruin for the want of a few miserable pounds. Every penny needed to rebuild, and to reglorify this wonderful heirloom which, for a while is ours, would be subscribed in a day or two—and yet the careless, heedless

Palestine Government makes no attempt to execute its duty and its privilege and has declared it unsafe for public use.

Here we are, arrived at the point where we are about to surrender the Crusaders' Heritage for which our men died in thousands, and we make no effort to leave, at least, one tangible memorial of the Allenby Crusade. Holy Sepulchre is shored up with steel beams and scaffolding to prevent it collapsing! Its fabric is saturated and rotten with the rains of eleven years which have poured into it since its roof was shattered by the earthquake of July, 1927. Yet we do nothing.

But why should I worry when the place is crowded with savagely jealous ecclesiastical lice—when even its authenticity of being the site of Calvary and the Tomb is open to the gravest doubt? For one reason: it is a place hallowed by the tears and blood, the joys and hardships of countless millions of simple, good, human beings. Apart from the fact that two million men died during the Crusades with the last words "Save us, Holy Sepulchre" falling from their paling lips, or roared as their final battle-shout, there are the millions of wayfarers who wandered to it from their homes in the West, in the days when it was a year's journey to reach Jerusalem, and when more than half of the pilgrims who set out never returned.

I looked at the steps hewn out of the solid rock which run down to the cistern that is called the Chapel of the Finding of the Cross, and saw the grooves, worn nearly a foot deep by the centuries of human feet creeping reverently down into the cool dim depths to pray, to reflect upon the abiding Mystery of the

Cross. Those worn steps, the thousands of crosses cut upon the walls, each one the ensign that a person of knightly rank had accomplished his pilgrimage, meant more to me than the jewel-encrusted statues and ikons on the Calvary platform, or the lamps of silver and alabaster around the Tomb Chapel, and over the Stone of Unction.

I came out of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre with two emotions dominant in my mind—hatred for organized Churches, their intolerance, and their cruelties, and a dawning wonder as to what the gentle Nazareth Rabbi would have thought if He were on earth to see what unscrupulous men have made of His simple creed. What would He think of people who work themselves up to the point of committing dastardly violence, fully believing that they are serving God in stamping out other human beings who differ from them only in such matters as the procession of the Holy Ghost, or as to the true nature of the union between the Divine and Human Natures in His earthly self?

My American friend thought much as I did. We tacitly agreed to leave the Holy Sepulchre to itself until we were in a softer, saner, and more tolerant mood. I realized that, in my disgust and hatred, I was drawing perilously close, in my disgust of professional ecclesiasticism, to the standpoint of the persecutors.

We visited the two Gardens of Gethsemane; the extremely questionable Tomb of the Virgin; the even more suspect Abbey of the Dormition on Mount Zion where she is believed to have died; the supremely unlikely identification of Calvary and the Tomb on the

green knoll outside the Damascus Gate which is now a Moslem cemetery; and a score of other sites which we knew to be spurious.

One little place of peace I discovered, an ancient crypt-chapel once belonging to the Knights of the Hospital. It is in Christian Street, close to its junction with the main thoroughfare between Jaffa Gate and the gates of the Temple Area, and lies beneath a modern Greek chapel. Here, at last, I found myself at peace in the dim darkness of the underground crypt, whose bricked-up windows showed that it had once been on ground level.

Things were very unsafe in Jerusalem—after dark we stayed in the Casa Nova, for it was nearly as much as one's life was worth to wander the streets after sunset dressed in European clothes. In the daytime the narrow lanes and alleys were full of armed police and military patrols, but after darkness set in it was safest to keep inside the house. There were not only Arab terrorists and assassins to be considered, for some of the patrols had the lightest of fingers on pistol and rifle triggers.

Once we had a narrow escape. We went to the Government Museum of Antiquities, close to the north-eastern angle of the walls. On our way back to the New Gate, a single-decked Jewish bus went past us up the hill. It was close to the big building of the Notre Dame de France, about sixty yards ahead of us, when my American friend suddenly grabbed me and threw me flat. A thundering explosion shook the air, and the street seemed filled with flying splinters.

Someone had thrown a bomb into the bus, but,



fortunately, the British constable in charge of it acted like a hero. He bent down, seized the smoking missile, and hurled it back into the street, where it had burst, fortunately without killing anyone, but many had miraculous escapes.

That was about the only violently unpleasant experience we had in Jerusalem, though most nights we heard scattered shots, and, at least twice, the sustained rattle of a machine-gun. But the air of sullen and bitter hatred which hung over the whole city, mingled with deathly fear and envenomed resentment, was enough to make the hardiest shiver. Dark, lowering glances from Arabs sitting on their little stools in front of cafés, looks that said clearly enough, "If it wasn't for those soldiers at the end of the street, *you* would never be seen again." I was anxious to be gone, and yet, fascinated, I stayed my full time.

There were other unpleasantnesses, such as being stopped at barriers by armed police and searched for concealed arms, but we endured them cheerfully, and took precautions.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

MY relationship with Edgar brought me one piece of luck, I was allowed to ride in a police lorry, and so visited Bethlehem, Hebron and Beer-sheba, places that I should not otherwise have seen.

The great basilica in Bethlehem, covering the Stable-cave, impressed me more than anything else I had seen in Palestine, except only for Capernaum, the Sea of Galilee and the stark Horns of Hattin. In its way it struck me as the crowning achievement of Christian men in the Holy Land. The ancient building is the oldest church now standing in all the world. At least it is the oldest church built for specifically Christian purposes, though there are temples and basilicas in Rome and elsewhere which were taken for Christian usage after being purged of the worship of the old gods.

The Stable struck me with a force that the Tomb could not equal, for, though it does not matter in the slightest, it probably is the place where poor little fourteen-year-old Marymother endured her woman's agony, to bring forth her First-born, and thereby to leave a Riddle over which the centuries have fought, and argued, and murdered, and which is still as far from being answered as it ever was.

Hebron is a savage town, where the full flame of religious fanaticism is ablaze. There the awful lambent

strength of Islam breathes its hatred of Frankish mastery, as it does nowhere else in all Palestine. To-day, as in David's time, Hebron is the cradle of insurgence, of discontent, and of rebellion. I felt glad that I was in the midst of an armed party of British police, and the sight of the Lewis-gun we carried was more comforting than the sudden appearance of a legion of angels.

Hebron is one of the most historically important places on earth, and I would have greatly liked to have seen the Harem el Khulil, the great mosque built over the Cave of Macpelah, where lie buried Abraham, Sarah, Jacob and Isaac. There can be little doubt of the genuineness of the site; for, whether or not the mighty dead who lie here are the legendary patriarchs, they are at least some heroic progenitors of the primitive Hebrews, some great figures who played a mighty part in their dim, early, tribal history. The tradition is continuous from the dawn of historical times, and there have been zealous guardians of the graves in an unbroken chain, whether Hebrew, Jewish, Christian or Moslem.

I saw the Pool of Hebron—a place of History if there is one in all this world. I was shown the small glass factories, and then, as my lorry was ready, we took the road south and rolled through the hills, past a village called Dahariya, which once was Kiryeth Sepher. It was stormed by Caleb, one of Joshua's generals, who promised his daughter in marriage to the first man to set foot on the parapets of the wall. The fine springs close to the village are just one more proof of the geographical accuracy of the Bible. Read

Joshua xv, 15-20, where it is related how they were added by Joshua to the Lady Achsah's dowry.

We came at last to Beersheba, and, although there are modern houses there, I found that I was back in patriarchal Palestine, for the streets were crammed with Bedouins of the desert, come into town for the market and for a chance to gossip. I saw the famous seven wells which give the place its name.

Here was another link with my friend of Carmel, gaunt, grim Elijah. He arrived in Beersheba, in a tearing, sweating hurry, one jump ahead of Queen Jezebel's Flying Squad, and with barely sufficient time to take a header into the waste of desert which comes right up to the town's boundaries. Beersheba was also Sheikh Abraham's headquarters, and it played a mighty part in the early days of the Hebrew folk; it was here that Abimelech and Isaac signed their non-aggression and collective security pact as chronicled in Genesis xxvi, 23-33.

Strangely enough the atmosphere of hatred and repression which hangs over modern Palestine seemed to be missing from Beersheba. The Bedouins frankly despised the Europeans, and were at no pains to conceal it. But it was an honest fighting-man's contempt, there was none of the deadly baffled resentment and concealed murder I saw amongst the fat city men. The desert-riders felt themselves men, soldiers, knights if you like, and they were completely and delightfully arrogant in their very sincere feeling of utter superiority. My heart warmed towards these Sons of the Sand, who dressed like beggars and yet walked with the proud steps of conquerors and

kings; who admitted no superiors and scarcely an equal.

We came back to Jerusalem by way of Beit Jibrin, the ancient Gath, from which came Goliath the Giant. We halted for a night in Beit Jibrin, and though I badly wanted to see the wonderful painted caves, and the ruins of the Castle of Blanchegarde which had seen Richard Lion-heart in camp before it, I preferred the chance to accompany a mounted patrol towards Khirbet Eid el Ma, the identified site of the Cave of Adullam, about seven miles north-easterly from Beit Jibrin. It certainly fulfils all the needs of the story of David, for it has been a mighty fortress, the ideal lair for a brigand gang, which is what David and his men were. It had a complete command over the rich corn-growing valley of Elah, and the site of the Forest of Hareth lies close by (1st Samuel xxii, 2nd Samuel xxiii, 13 and 1st. Chronicles xi, 15). Once more the sheer accuracy of locations as laid down in the Bible, with its minute regard for topography, struck home.

But the main purpose of my having joined the patrol was because they were returning to Beit Jibrin by way of the Wadi es Sunt, the vale which was once Elah, the place where David the shepherd boy had his encounter with Goliath.

I could never quite understand one aspect of the tale—why the Israelites had not made a sudden sally when Goliath stalked down to insult and defy them. The giant was a long way from his own lines and a sudden, overwhelming attack by a score of determined men must have bowled him over and brought him captive or dead into Saul's camp. That little point

had caused me to doubt the whole account; to put it down as merely one more of the usual hero-tales with which chroniclers love to embellish the folk-lore stories of national champions.

One glance at the scene of the encounter resolved all the doubts I had had on that score. I think that the hard-bitten British police troopers put me down as merely another daft Bible-puncher when I brought out my small Book, and read the seventeenth chapter of 1st Samuel. They did not realize that I was reading it to get the topography of the scene of action clear in my mind. In any case, I had got past the stage where I worried about what folks thought of my Bible-reading.

In one glance I was able to take in the whole ancient scene. The Israelites had been on one side of the steep valley, the Philistines on the other. At the bottom, the valley ended in little sheer-sided cliffs on either side of a dry torrent-bed, not very high, but an insuperable barrier to any surprise attack by desperate warriors maddened by the taunts of their enemy. The Israelites could not have issued from their lines, scrambled down the little cliffs, and climbed the opposing one with any hope of successfully attacking Goliath before the Philistines could have rushed to his aid. Goliath, braying his defiance and contempt, was perfectly safe from sudden onfall.

In the same way the so-called "miracle" of David's feat was explained. He must have cast his sling-stone from the lip of his own cliff, not more than thirty yards from the exulting brute in front of him. Likewise he was secure from any devastating rush by that

man of war, safe from the heavy spear of the Giant of Gath.

One further little proof of the authenticity of the old Tale—the dry torrent-bed at the bottom of the valley was filled with water-worn pebbles, many of them just the convenient size and shape to make ideal sling-stones.

I could almost see that shepherd boy coming down the steep hillside, sensibly divested of the proffered armour; by the way, that had been another of my difficulties, it had seemed merely another bit of padding to emphasize the bravery of the national hero, David, but I now saw that the armour would have been worse than useless for what the lad intended.

The whole story bears the ring of truth. David's taunts to the giant, done with the one purpose of making him throw up his head to roar his anger; to uncover his forehead for a moment as his helmet-brim was thrown back with the tilting head. These hill-shepherd boys to this day are dead shots with their slings, and David lost no second in seizing his chance. As soon as the giant's forehead was exposed, David let loose the missile, and down crashed the stunned giant. Here was where the boy was so sensible in refusing the heavy armour. He had to scramble down the little cliff, scale the opposing side, and administer his death-blow before the Philistines could rush to the aid of their stunned champion, or Goliath could recover from the blow.

Verse 51 bears out the tale; it says "David *ran* and stood upon the Philistine" and then beheaded him with the giant's own sword. It was a fast, breathless

matter of split-seconds. The "miracle" resolved itself into a matter of clear thinking, close calculation, and the gallant taking of a long chance. If my distrust of the "miracle" was gone, my respect for the boy David, and for the truth of the chronicle came back with an overwhelming rush.

I wish that I had had more time, and opportunity, to visit more of the scenes of the old Tale, for I am sure, with intelligence and a clear reading, that most of the Bible could be proved to be true enough in its historical accounts.

Back we rode to Beit Jibrin, and next morning, by way of the track-road at the foot of the mountains, we passed across the opening of the Vale of Sorek, agog with its contacts with Philistines, and redolent of the story of Samson and his Delilah. By way of the Bab-el-Wad Inn, one of the stations on the Pilgrim Way between Jaffa and Jerusalem, we came to the main road and so back to the Holy City.

One more trip I made. I visited Jaffa and Tel Aviv, its twin city. The sheer modern efficiency and progressive aggressiveness of the Jewish capital were overpowering. Jaffa is dying, a place of hatred, futile anger and lost hope.

I was glad to leave both towns and to return to my Hospice in Jerusalem.



## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

I DETERMINED to be alone on my last day in Jerusalem, so that I might strike a mental balance whilst all that I had seen and learned was fresh and vivid in my memory.

To win quietness and peace I walked down to the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre, turned right, along the pitch dark ambulatory at the foot of the Calvary platform, and passed down the broad stairs to the Armenian Chapel of St. Helena. I did not pause there, but continued by the dangerous, deeply-worn stone steps, to the dark cistern of the Finding of the Cross.

It was cool, utterly quiet, far removed from the din and sectarian jealousies of the main floor of the great Church. As my eyes slowly grew accustomed to the dim light, I made out the statue of the Roman barmaid-Empress Helena on an altar, holding a replica of the Cross which she is supposed to have discovered. Under the overhanging virgin rock of the cistern is a stone bench, and there I took my seat.

Association, naturally, brought my thoughts to the last pitiful scenes of blood, of sweat, of anguish, and of dereliction in His life. Historically, there is every reason to believe the accounts we still have left to us. They tally in every particular with the usual procedure of Roman executions of felons. More, the earliest of

all New Testament writings, the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, which even the sternest critics admit to have been written not more than twenty years after the Tragedy of Calvary, shows clearly that the death and resurrection of Christ were matters of common, everyday belief to the first Christians.

There were many men, then alive, who had first-hand knowledge of the events which Paul mentioned, though the handful of Greek Christians to whom he wrote had to accept the account on faith alone. Even Paul's personal conviction was based on second-hand evidence, but he evidently saw no reason to doubt the accounts he had heard from some of the actors in the drama.

The Gospel of Mark, too, is only about fifteen years later than that letter of Paul's, and, although it breaks off abruptly in mid-sentence at the end of verse 8 in the last chapter (the rest is a later addition), it also bears witness to what the contemporaries of the Master thought of His rising from the dead.

I allowed my thoughts to roam at will. To reach my conclusions some loose thinking was necessary at the commencement. The figure of the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, emerged from the thinning fog of my mental background. What was he? Rogue, stern ruler, coward or cynical politician. A mixture of all four if what is written about him is correct. There was a lot of our own type of petty colonial governors about friend Pontius. Like some of them, he was the product of a family which had risen to the minor aristocracy from the lower orders; for his name shows that he was the descendant of a freed slave whose

heirs had attained knightly station, and, like some of his modern brethren-in-office, dependent upon influential "wire-pulling".

His whole attitude towards the people he governed for ten years was modelled on that of Sejanus, his patron, the man whose influence had won for him nomination to the High Commissionership of Palestine and Transjordan. Sejanus hated Jews, and Pilate saw no reason to differ from his "boss". Sejanus was somewhat of an intellectual, Pilate aped him—"What is Truth?" said Pilate, and straightway went out—playing at philosophical discussion. The Master must, most certainly, have taken the true measure of the muddle-headed greedy Jack-in-office seated on the bench, for He refused to bandy words with Pilate. Were there ever answers made to a venal judge so quietly dignified as those which the Prisoner returned?

Finally, to save trouble, to obviate the need to answer questionnaires from the Colonial Office in Rome if he had allowed a riot to occur, Pilate hustled the troublesome Teacher off to execution. Priestly bigotry and the power of national vested interests triumphed for the moment; but then, three days afterwards, came the Riddle which no one has yet solved. Did the Master rise from the dead? If He did, was it through some power of His own, or was it because of the Will of God?

Did Christ rise again or not? That was the whole crux of the question which concerned me.

In the quiet dimness of this ancient holy place, hallowed by the sacrifices and abnegations of seventeen

centuries which it has witnessed, I faced the issue which seemed, at the moment, to have such paramount importance for me.

To what did it all amount? This Resurrection from the dead of that quiet, kindly Man of Galilee who had suffered death so unjustly, close upon two thousand years ago. It boiled down to facing the Riddle of the Empty Tomb, so far as I could see. There seemed to be little doubt that, on that first Easter Sunday dawning, the tomb in which Joseph of Arimathea had laid the poor lacerated corpse of the Crucified was empty—for some reason the Body had gone. I tried to face the subject as though the Body had been that of any ordinary political victim, and to seek a rational answer. What could have happened to it? There appeared to be at least eight alternatives.

1. That Mary of Magdala and her companions went to the wrong sepulchre, and, in their hysterical and overwrought state, mistook an empty tomb for the Sepulchre of the Master.

2. That the Body was removed by order of Pontius Pilate and destroyed.

3. That the Body was taken away by the priestly party, who were anxious to avoid any chance of the place becoming a shrine, and, therefore, a political and ecclesiastical nuisance to them.

4. That the Master was not dead when He was taken down from the Cross, and recovered in the cool darkness of the cave-sepulchre.

5. That for some reason Joseph of Arimathea removed the Body.

6. That the women either lied, or else that the whole story was a later invention of the chroniclers.

7. That the Disciples stole the Body, and either reburied, or destroyed It, so as to make a case for the Resurrection, and thereby regain the prestige which they had lost by the execution of their Leader.

8. That the whole Story of the Resurrection is simply and literally true. That the Master was indeed God. That, by His own Divine Power, He burst the bonds of death and rose triumphant from the Tomb.

Quietly, deliberately, I went over the different alternatives in my mind. The first; that the women were mistaken in the locality of the Grave. Certainly they were in a very distressed and excitable condition when they saw Joseph of Arimathea bearing away the Body in the dusk of Friday evening. They probably took no part in the actual interment. Jewish women do not attend funerals, and seeing that He was in good hands, they probably stood off, some distance from the Tomb, and were mere witnesses of what took place.

Yet I believed that I might discard this point—Mary of Magdala was not likely to be mistaken in such a matter. Her love and pity for the Master were not of the order which would have caused her to make a mistake in so vital a matter. Women are built that way—something in their spiritual make-up absolutely forbids any likelihood of their being mistaken in identifying the tomb of a loved one whom they had lost.

I came to the second point. Would Pontius Pilate have been sufficiently interested to have had the Body

removed? I thought it scarcely likely. It is quite obvious from the Record that the Roman Procurator was ashamed, uncomfortable, and therefore surlily aggressive, because of the shabby part which political necessity had forced him to play.

Certainly he had passed the unjust sentence; he had sent an innocent Man to a shameful and agonizing death, and, because he had been forced to truckle to the Jewish priests, whom he had hated and despised, Pilate was in no good mood. That seems quite obvious when we see the petty satisfaction he got in curtly refusing to alter the superscription he had written to be placed on the Cross. Surely it must have been an unheard-of thing for a Roman Governor to have gone to the trouble of writing such a notice—that would normally have been the affair of a minor official. Then, again, he had scornfully refused to provide a guard of legionaries to watch over the Tomb. No! I could see no reason for Pontius Pilate having ordered the removal of the Body. Besides, if he had done so, he would have carried it out openly, glad of the chance to show his contempt for things Jewish.

The third alternative; the removal of the Body by the priests, seemed more likely. In modern Palestine, in June, 1930, the local Government tried to dispose of the corpses of the three Arab leaders who were executed for the part they played in the 1929 Rebellion. The priests certainly had reason to remove the Body. Not that they believed in any possible Resurrection; for the most part they were Sadducees who had no belief in a future life, and certainly none in the rising of the dead.

But they may have feared either one of two things. That the Body might be stolen by the Disciples in the hope of establishing proof of the Master's Resurrection and in this case it is useful to remember that some utterance of the Master's had been the whole grounds of the prosecution against Him. Remember that the witnesses who testified against Him immediately after His arrest, all brought the same charge. St. Mark says:

"There stood up certain, and bare false witness against him, saying, We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands and in three days I will build another made without hands."

St. Matthew puts it thus:

"But afterwards came two, and said, This man said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days."

Certainly there must have been much talk of Resurrection in the air; running abroad amongst the hordes of common folk who thronged Jerusalem for the Festival. But this, I felt, would not have caused the Sadducees to have stolen the Body; they were Rationalists, and must have believed that any Resurrection was unthinkable. But, as Rationalists, as extremely clever and able politicians, they may have felt that with the passing of the Sabbath, people might come flocking to the tomb. In a few hours the same sort of thing which was to take place in Canterbury Cathedral eleven centuries afterwards, when Beckett was slain, could easily have happened in Jerusalem.

Yet, if the priests did steal the Body, why did they

not produce the fact in evidence a few years later, when they commenced their persecution against the Jewish Christians? The sworn testimony of the men who carried out the exhumation would have effectually stopped the flow of converts to the Primitive Church. Yet, never once did they attempt to do this—their one parrot-cry was "The disciples stole the Body". So, I felt, I could discard this side of the matter also.

I came to the fourth possibility—that the Master was not dead when He was laid in the tomb. There is much to support this theory. Men generally lived longer than three hours on the Cross; even Pilate was surprised when told that He was already dead. St. Mark, whose Gospel is certainly the oldest of the narratives, says in chapter xv, 44, 45:

"And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead, and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead.

"And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph."

Strangely enough, in this earliest and most authoritative of the Gospels, there is no mention of the Master's side having been pierced with a spear, in fact, only John (xix, 34) mentions this fact—the other three evangelists are silent on the point, which is of superlative interest in so far as this theory is concerned. Now John's is a Gospel which may grow upon me in the future, but, for the present, I must frankly state that I do not like it, or, rather, I do not understand it.

It seems quite certain that it was not written until



and contempt of womenfolk would, perhaps, consider the fetching of the Mother to her Son most unnecessary and dangerous. For, if this recovery from death-like coma really did occur, Death must have followed quickly, for the Master was no man to have hidden for the remainder of His life, supposing He had been restored to life.

I came to my fifth point. Maybe Joseph had only intended to give a temporary resting-place in his new tomb to the Crucified, because of the lateness of the hour and he was intending to remove the Body later to some other sepulchre. Perhaps Joseph was naught but a pious and orthodox Jew, anxious to discharge the greatest and last of the Corporal Works of Mercy. In this case, surely, he would have offered burial to all three of the dead; yet there is no record that he included the two thieves in his charity. No! It was as an honour to the Master whom he revered that he offered his tomb. Joseph ran a great risk by making such a gesture, he stood in certain expectation of oppression and persecution from the priestly party. It is not likely, or even conceivable, that such a man would disturb his honoured dead from a selfish motive. Still less, that he would take all the trouble of doing so in the darkness of pre-dawn.

My sixth alternative I did not entertain for a moment. I could not believe that these loving and sorrowing women had deliberately lied, nor that such patently honest accounts as the rugged fragment of Mark are the work of later chroniclers.

The seventh, that the disciples stole the Body, was plausible enough at the outset, until one looked more

deeply into it.\* Something had put heart-of-grace into the poor dispirited fragments of the Master's following who had fled when the Government struck at their Chief. These men could not have faced the dangers which afterwards beset them, nor have endured death and torture, as most of them did, if they had known their creed was a lie. No, the Apostles themselves were firmly and deeply convinced that their Master had actually risen, they could not have lived the lives they did if they had been merely cynical liars!

Most shattering proof of the Apostles' personal good faith and their honest deep conviction: one of His brothers, James, a man who had stood out against Him during His lifetime, became the head of the little, but evergrowing body which believed in Him! Try to realize what that means! A man, linked by the closest ties of relationship, His own brother, came to believe in His mission. James had grown up alongside Jesus, had had his squabbles with Him, had seen and noted many of the things which He did, in fact knew Him "from the inside", from the closest of intimacies. It is all so very human when you come to think of it. James had had no patience with Jesus' claims whilst He was still alive, and yet something happened to make that hard-headed and cynical brother into the chief and leader of His church.

No! It does not seem likely that the Disciples stole the Body and then hid it, or destroyed it, to afford proof of a faked Resurrection.

Then was the whole incredible story true? Misgiving set in at once. There seems to be little doubt that the very earliest of His followers did not believe in the

approximately a century after the tragedy of Calvary; it recounts a number of incidents which are in seeming contradiction to the simple, sweet personality of the Master as portrayed by the writers who knew and worked with Him. There is none of the rugged grandeur of Mark, for instance. Let me give just one instance of what I mean—the account of the sickness and raising of Lazarus from the dead. Does the story of the Master purposely delaying for two days to come to His friend's help, ring true? The Master, as I see Him, would not have caused all that unnecessary suffering to the man whose friend He was, nor have exposed Martha and Mary to extremes of mental anguish, merely to make an occasion to display His powers, or to afford an opportunity for self-advertisement.

Neither is it even remotely possible that John the Evangelist is John, one of the "Sons of Thunder". No, the Gospel of John was written long after everyone who was living in the Master's day was dead.

It is strange that none of the earlier writers mention this matter of the Master's side having been pierced with a lance. The fact remains, Pilate was astonished that the Master was dead, and cursorily accepted the officer's word that life was extinct. Death by crucifixion was a slow and horrible business—the Master was a strong and sturdy man—he had undergone no debilitating imprisonment, scarce twelve hours elapsed between arrest and execution, and, despite His scourging, He must have been still strong and resilient. So, outwardly, there may be a possibility that He fell into a death-like coma, and recovered as Joseph laid Him in the cool tomb.

Only thus, however, can the emptiness of the Sepulchre be explained. If the Master had recovered after Joseph and Nicodemus had rolled the stone, He must subsequently have expired, and His body would have been found there on Sunday morning. The tomb was closed with a great stone, so heavy that three strong peasant women doubted their power to move it. No man with lacerated hands and feet, with torn muscles and dislocated joints, could have done so.

But, if Joseph, who believed in the Master's innocence (Luke xxiii, 50, 51), had been charitable enough to give honourable burial to the bloody wreck of an executed felon's body, he would certainly not have been brute enough to have returned a swooning, wounded man to be tortured again. Therefore Joseph *may* have taken Him from the Tomb, and secretly restored Him to life. But He must have died during the nursing, and was secretly buried, as Joseph, for his own safety's sake, dared not let it be known that he had resuscitated a criminal condemned by the Roman power.

That, certainly, would explain the Riddle of the Empty Tomb, but the probabilities are against it. Firstly, the centurion is not likely to have been mistaken. Secondly, it would be stretching coincidence rather far to suppose that the crucified man should recover in the very nick of time for Joseph to have found him alive. Thirdly, surely by some means, if this had really occurred, Marymother would have been brought by a compassionate Joseph to the side of her Son, especially if He was again about to pass away; though Joseph from fear and the Oriental disregard

personal Divinity of the Master. That Creed was a growth of later years, and of mass-enthusiasm when St. Paul's preaching had made the story of the Rabbi of Nazareth known throughout the Mediterranean world. It is a surprising thing to discover, but it is true. Yet, after all, is it so exceptional? Mankind has a way of deifying heroes, of making its heroes into gods. Such a thing appears to have happened in this case. The simple, gentle, far-seeing, wise and inspired Son of the Carpenter and Marymother, has been raised to the status of God. Maybe He is truly God, though none of his contemporaries seem to have thought so.

Was He God? Had He really risen from the dead through His own power? Had Almighty God reversed the whole order of Nature to re-animate His discarded envelope of flesh? If so, where now was the mass of chemicals which composed it? Matter can only exist in material surroundings. It must always remain material. I felt myself, I, an earthy Dorset farmer, with no interests save those of Earth, descending into an abyss of the spirit.

Then I thought of the Apparitions—the appearances of the Master to His disciples after the tragedy of Calvary was consummated. What did they mean? I could find no answer. I know naught of Spiritualism, except that I do not think, or believe, that *all* the people who see things which we do not normally see or encounter, are fools or liars. There is something there which we do not want to understand. Something which I am too cowardly to want to understand. I know that we are of the earth, earthy. Perhaps, some day, these so-called “supernatural” phenomena

will be understood and explained by children at school, just as nowadays, a twelve-year-old boy or girl can tell you all about the theory of flight or television, things which would have been black magic to our grandfathers. I just do not know.

I have never felt such dereliction of soul, as that I suffered in the dim and sacred grotto beneath the great Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, and I trust that I never shall again.

Then, suddenly, I felt something, something which I shall never feel again. Peace, utter, comforting, radiant Peace, descended upon me. I am laying no claim to be a mystic, I am too much a fleshy human man for that, but I declare that I felt a Presence near me, a Presence which spread its warm, glowing and completely soothing mantle around and over me. There were no words, no voice, and yet I heard, as clearly as though human lips had framed the words:

"Why worry?" it breathed. "Why harass and distress yourself? These questions are not for you, though you, too, at the last, will know their answer. What does it matter whether Jesus was God or simple Man? It is not He, not His physical personality, that matters to you. It is what He said, and what He taught, that is of importance to you and to other perplexed, struggling humans.

"In another ten generations, with the annihilation of distance, and the instantaneousness of communications, the water-tight compartments which have divided race from race, and the artificial compartments which you call nations, will all have disappeared.

"There will be Gethsemane for Mankind before peace finally comes to a world which has grown very small to its mischievous, fractious children. Wars, blood and misery lie in wait for the world, but these are naught but the birth-pangs of a new and brave Earth, where race, and colour and nationality will have gone for ever, where War will, therefore, have disappeared, though it will be many a thousand years before the perversities and contradictions of fallible human nature are altered and sublimated.

"What will these men and women of the New World have to say of you, and of the generations before you?

"For two thousand years you have had the Way of Perfection open before you, and you have ignored it. These children will marvel that you took no notice of what He taught—for He showed the road which leads to the Utopia you might enjoy. You talk about Him, yet you have buried Him under a mass of unimportant detail and legend. Think only of His teaching, for it was to the conditions of your world to which He referred.

"Therefore cease wondering and distressing yourself about these unimportant matters. It is of no significance whether or not He was God; whether He rose from the Dead; whether He ascended into Heaven; if you will only try to follow His teaching, and so make your world the better for your having passed through it.

"It matters not one whit whether you exist after death or not. Do you need the promise of future reward to make you do your duty, and to take your part to aid in, as well as you may, the formation of a new

world? There is plenty for all—food, shelter, clothes, comfort, love. First make your physical corporeal conditions perfect, and then there will be time and opportunity for Man to go farther and to discover what, if anything, lies beyond. You have no time to worry about such further matters until you have carried out the first part of your task. No more War, no more Social Injustice, no more Poverty or Slavery—that is what He taught—the love of God and of your fellow-man. Do that and the other things will be added to you and your children.

“That is all—so concern yourself no longer with these questions. Think no more of His personality, of the historical facts in regard to Him. Hear His message and model yourself on His model, that is all that is of importance.

“Work for no reward to yourself. Work only to make the Earthly Paradise come closer. Remember the simple fact that you do all your little actions in the Presence and Sight of God. Conduct yourself as you would in the presence of an honoured superior, as you would say, if the King or the President of your land was sitting in your front room watching you with kindly eyes. Do not look for Heaven—if there is a Heaven it will be awarded to you, if you deserve it. Do not fear Hell—a just and merciful God could not allow a Hell such as that of which the Churches bleat.

“If it helps you, then think of Him as a man like yourself, and cease to worry about matters which do not concern you. Do only that which is within your power, and leave to your remote descendants the



answering of the Riddle. Remember the solution may be so simple, that the kindergarten children of the future will know it as clearly as your children now understand the scientific discoveries of the past few years.

“Go. Keep your soul in peace. Cease to worry yourself about things which do not concern you, when you and your generation have left so much undone, and there is so much to do. Remember His words: all that He said is contained in that one sentence ‘*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and thy neighbour as thyself*’.”

. . . . .

That is the end of my story.

That is what I learned from my visit to Palestine.

I came out into the bright sunshine of the Sepulchre's forecourt, a man dazed, but fully convinced of the sheer commonsense of what the Voice said to me in the grotto.

